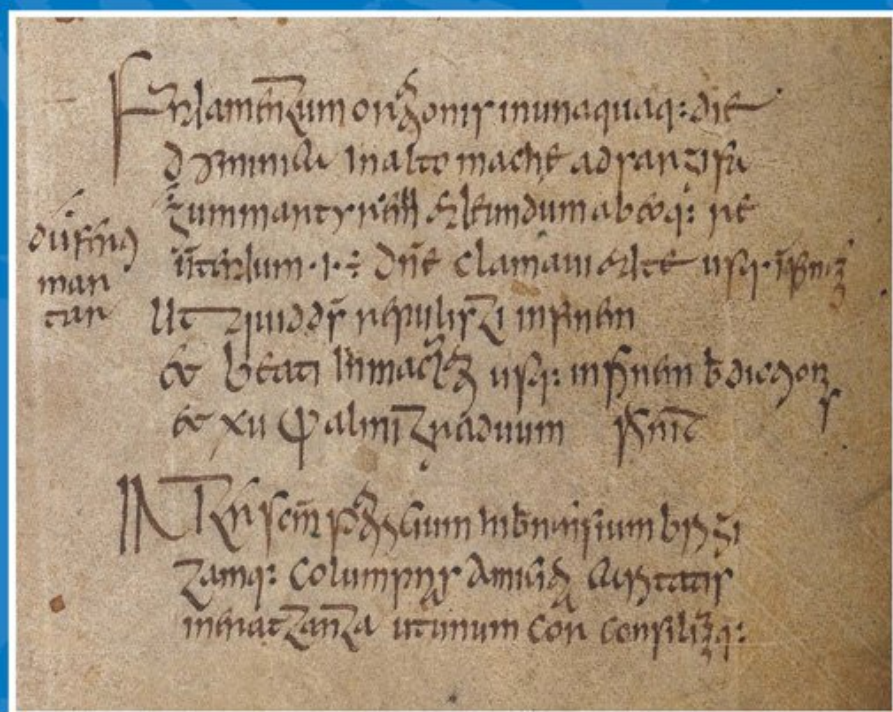# THE CULT OF RELICS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Niamh Wycherley

BREPOLS

THE CULT OF RELICS
IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

STUDIES IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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The Cult of Relics
in Early Medieval Ireland

by

Niamh Wycherley

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Contents

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Abbreviations

AFM	*Annála Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. by John O'Donovan, 7 vols (Dublin, Hodges and Smith, 1848–51)
AI	*The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B503)*, ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951)
ATig	'The Annals of Tigernach', ed. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 16 (1895), pp. 374–419; 17 (1896), pp. 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), pp. 9–59, 150–97, 267–303
AU	*The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131) Part I. Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983)
Bethu Phátraic	*Bethu Phátraic*, ed. by Kathleen Mulchrone (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1939)
CIH	*Corpus iuris Hibernici*, ed. by Daniel A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CS	*Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. by William M. Hennessy (London: Longmans, 1866)
DACL	*Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. by Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, 15 vols (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–53)

DIL   *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. by Gregory
                         Toner and others <www.dil.ie> (Royal Irish Academy and
                         Queens University Belfast, 2007–13)

Félire   *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*,
                         ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society, 29
                         (London: Harrison and Sons, 1905)

Heist, *VSH*   *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, ex codice olim Salmanticensi nunc
                         Bruxellensi*, ed. by William W. Heist, Subsidia Hagiographica,
                         28 (Brussels: Bollandists, 1965)

Hibernensis   *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis — Die irische Kanonen-
                         sammlung*, ed. by Helmut Wasserschleben (Leipzig: Bernhard
                         Tauchnitz, 1885)

JRSAI   *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*

LA   *Liber Angeli*, in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed.
                         by Ludwig Bieler, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 10 (Dublin:
                         Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), pp. 184–91

MGH   Monumenta Germaniae Historica

MGH *SRM*   Monumenta Germaniae Historica, *Scriptores Rerum Mero-
                         vingicarum*

Muirchú   Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of
                         Armagh*, ed. by Ludwig Bieler, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae,
                         10 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979),
                         pp. 62–123

PRIA   *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*

Plummer, *BNÉ*   *Bethada Náem Nérenn: Lives of Irish Saints*, ed. by Charles
                         Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922)

Plummer, *VSH*   *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols
                         (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910)

Thes. Pal.   *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ed. by Whitley Stokes and John
                         Strachan, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
                         1901–03)

Tírechán   Tírechán, *Collectanea*, in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. by Ludwig Bieler, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 10 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), pp. 122–67

VCog   Cogitosus, *Vita S. Brigitae*, ed. by Jean Bolland and others, Acta Sanctorum, 3rd ser., 1 February (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1863), pp. 135–41

Vita Prima   *Vita Prima S. Brigitae*, ed. by Jean Bolland and others, Acta Sanctorum, 3rd ser., 1 February (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1863), pp. 119–35

VSC   *Vita S. Columbae — Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. by Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie, rev. edn by Marjorie Ogilvie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991)

Introduction

In October 2013, the corporeal relics of St Anthony of Padua toured Ireland (and Britain) to mark the 750th anniversary of the discovery of Anthony's incorrupt tongue, and the translation of his relics. The estimated 250,000 visitors, and the reported millions that attended the tours of St Thérèse's relics in 2001, 2009, and 2012, suggest that, even in an era of declining church attendance, the cult of relics is still a force in popular devotion.[1] The success of these tours offers us an insight into the enduring power with which saintly remains have been invested in Ireland.

A key feature of the new Christian religion that grew in power and popularity during the last centuries of the Roman Empire was the rise of the holy man or saint.[2] Saints bridged the heavenly and earthly realms and acted as intercessors on behalf of believers.[3] This connection was made more tangible by the presence of the physical remains of the saint and worshippers sought proximity to these relics to confirm and solidify this communion. The urge to physically touch, kiss, or just be in the presence of saintly remains survives to this day. The growing demand led to the profusion of contact relics, and the disinterring and eventual fragmentation of saints' bodies so that Christians from around the empire could feel that physical connection to these special individuals. The saint was both patron and mediator. Those who have examined the sociology of saints are agreed that they reflect the structure of the societies that produce and

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[1] In 2001, an estimated three million Irish people turned out at venues across Ireland to venerate the Relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux. See Healy and McCaffrey, *St Thérèse in Ireland*, p. 10.

[2] For an analysis of the fundamental differences between holy man and saint, see Cameron, 'On Defining the Holy Man'.

[3] For what follows, see Brown, 'Rise and Function of the Holy Man'; *The Cult of Saints*, ed. by Howard-Johnston and Hayward.

honour them. It could be argued that the Christian cult of the saints grew out of the pagan cult of the hero. For example, the popularity of the cult of Brigit, despite the dearth of any real biographical information about the Christian saint, is sometimes attributed to her associations with a pagan goddess of the same name.[4] However, a Christian saint was an intimate companion with whom all Christians could have a close relationship. Saints acted as intercessors between God and mortals in a way which Roman heroes or 'Celtic' goddesses could never have done.

Relics are a manifestation of the cult of the saint. As such, an understanding of the role and veneration of saints in the medieval Church and society is key to any study of the cult of relics.[5] Relics were regarded as extensions of the saint's body and shared its sacred quality. Indeed, as Patrick Geary succinctly puts it, 'the relics *were* the saint'.[6] We will see that, through the perceived intervention of the saint they belonged to, relics were used for many purposes, for example, to heal the sick, to effect favourable changes in weather, and to ensure victory in battle. Relics can be examined to study hagiography or saints' cults, but more importantly they should be explored to understand the roles of saints' remains in the community. One finds in the uses of saints' relics an image of their function in society. From the perspective of social rather than religious or intellectual history, this subject allows for a progression from the study of texts, objects, and gestures to an understanding of their place in the structure of medieval society.[7] Perhaps the most potent aspect of any examination of the cult of relics is the information that is revealed about the culture that treasures and honours them. The ways in which relics are used (and abused) by local and global communities has been recognized as going to the heart of these societies' core beliefs, identities, and interactions. This topic has not yet been thoroughly examined in relation to the history of early medieval Ireland in a single study. It is a very fruitful field in which there is much to be discovered about the early

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[4] *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. by Meyer, 150 (p. 15). For discussion, see, for example, Bray, 'Saint Brigit'; Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church*, pp. 5–16; Johnston, 'Pagan and Christian'.

[5] For the cult of saints see, for example, Delehaye, *Legends*; Brown, *Cult of Saints*; Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*; Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*; Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*; Geary, *Living with the Dead*; *Studies in Irish Hagiography*, ed. by Carey and others; *Cult of Saints in Medieval Scotland*, ed. by Boardman and Williamson; Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin*; Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints*; *Local Saints and Local Churches*, ed. by Thacker and Sharpe.

[6] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 34.

[7] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 34.

Irish Church and early Irish customs, politics, and society. In the Irish context, relics help deepen our understanding of how the pagan Irish adapted to the new religion. The Church was deeply influenced by the secular society which it, in turn, tried to shape. The present study hopes to provide a range of insights, not only into saints and relics, but also into the culture and people to whom they were so significant.

At the core of this work on relics in early medieval Ireland is an attempt to, momentarily, shift the focus away from the beautiful reliquaries in which they were housed. Medieval Ireland was rich in these shrines and reliquaries. While many in-depth studies on Irish shrines have been undertaken by archaeologists and art historians, there has been relatively little attention given to the relics which they housed. Needless to say, the exquisitely crafted and opulent shrines, while impressive, were theologically less important than the holy relics they ostensibly contained. This monograph will concentrate, therefore, not on the elaborate reliquaries of the eleventh and twelfth centuries but on the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-century relics they were purported to protect and glorify. By an examination of the documentary sources, in conjunction with the material evidence, the role of relics in early medieval Ireland will be explored. Through the innovation of art, architecture, and literature, the Irish churches, with support from their secular patrons, created cults around these holy remains, and in doing so defined the character and status of their communities.

A brief survey of the scholarship available on the cult of relics on the Continent reveals the richness and scope of the topic. Nevertheless, there are still relatively few major works on this important subject.[8] Some of the most influential studies are from German and French scholars. Examples are the contributions of Heinrich Fichtenau on the general role of relics in early medieval society, and of Klemens Honselmann on translations of relics.[9] Arnold Angenendt and Anton Legner have both provided accounts of the early history of relic cults,[10] and Martin Heinzelmann's treatise on *translatio* is still the authority on this particular aspect of relic veneration.[11] Perhaps the first groundbreaking major work was Nicole Herrmann-Mascard's French tome

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[8] Leclercq, 'Reliques et reliquaires', remains one of the best overviews of the early history of relic veneration. For a history of the evolution of Christian architecture with specific reference to relics, see Grabar, *Martyrium*; Grabar, 'From the Martyrium to the Church'.

[9] Fichtenau, 'Zum Reliquienwesen'; Honselmann, 'Reliquientranslationen'.

[10] Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*; Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult*.

[11] Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*.

published in 1975.[12] This is one of the only substantial texts dedicated to the legal development of the cult of relics and remains essential reading for the history of the cult and the role it played in the formation of the Church. In contrast, John McCulloh's analysis of the cult of relics in the writings of Gregory the Great reveals the detail and insight that can be gained from a short study with a more limited and specific focus.[13]

Peter Brown and Patrick Geary have been arguably the most important contributors to the study of the cult of relics from the Anglophone world. Credited with marking out Late Antiquity as a distinct phase of religious history, Peter Brown investigated the function of sanctity as a form of social and political power in the later Roman Empire.[14] Brown revolutionized the approach to this subject with his seminal essay on the 'holy man' in 1971 and again in 1981 with his *Cult of the Saints* where he explored the role of tombs, shrines, relics, and pilgrimages in the late antique Roman world.[15] Geary's short but authoritative study of the theft and translation of relics in the central Middle Ages elucidates the differences in mentalities, religious values, and social needs between different communities.[16] He demonstrates here that a thorough analysis of one aspect of history can illuminate much about the culture and beliefs of different societies at different stages. Since then, scholars such as Robert Markus, David Rollason, and Godefridus Snoek to name a few, have shown how a study of the cult of relics can yield valuable insights into the practices and beliefs of medieval society, and on the interactions between the Church and society.[17] More recently, scholars have turned their attention towards the role of relics in the interactions between secular and ecclesiastical elites and on the use of relics as tools of power and control. Edina Bozóky explores how relics can become forms of regalia, and how they are markers of royal or imperial power.[18] Bozóky

[12] Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*.

[13] McCulloh, 'Cult of Relics in Pope Gregory the Great'.

[14] See the collection of essays in *The Cult of Saints*, ed. by Howard-Johnston and Hayward for some modern reconsiderations of Brown's position.

[15] Brown, *Cult of Saints*. For a collection of some of his most influential essays including 'Relics and Social Status', see Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*.

[16] Geary, *Furta Sacra*. See also Geary, *Living with the Dead*, which brings together twelve of his most influential essays and emphasizes the problem of the dearth of research into hagiography and the cult of saints.

[17] Rollason, *Saints and Relics*; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*; Snoek, *Medieval Piety*.

[18] Bozóky, *La politique des reliques*.

shows that, increasingly from the Merovingian period, relics and ceremonies arising from their translation or installation became part of the legitimization and consecration of royal power. Similarly, in Ireland, church leaders aligned themselves with the holiest and most powerful saints and had a vested interest in promoting the cult of their patron saint.

These wide-ranging general analyses of the cult of relics are complemented by excellent local studies on the cult of relics in particular communities. For example, Julia Smith's article on medieval Brittany contrasts Breton ideas of sanctity with those prevalent in Carolingian Europe.[19] Katrinette Bodarwé shows that relics of Roman martyrs played a key role in the Christianization of Ottonian Saxony, and Alan Thacker reveals the influence of Frankish practice in the Anglo-Saxon Church, via an examination of the translations at Ely and Lindisfarne in the 690s.[20] Indeed, one does not need to remain in the realm of medieval Christianity to appreciate the impact of the cult of relics. The work of individuals such as Steve Smith and Erika Doss highlights that the preservation and veneration of objects associated with important figures in society, such as Lenin or even Elvis, is an age-old and widespread human trait.[21]

Given the diverse and plentiful array of studies on the cult of relics elsewhere it is surprising that a study of this scope has not yet been attempted for early medieval Ireland. The one exception is in the field of archaeology. Françoise Henry and Charles Thomas both carried out invaluable surveys of early Christian sites in Ireland, revealing the incredible richness of surviving early ecclesiastical sites.[22] Thomas's survey and analysis of the cult of relics in Ireland has been an excellent starting point for my research into the subject.[23] Over the last twenty years in particular, the field of archaeology has produced an impressive and invaluable amount of scholarship and is leading the way in relation to the study of the cult of relics in Ireland. Both Henry and Thomas laid the groundwork for the detailed studies of remote early Christian sites by archaeologists such as Thomas Fanning, Peter Harbison, Michael Herity,

[19] Smith, 'Oral and Written'.

[20] Bodarwé, 'Roman Martyrs in Ottonian Saxony'; Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint'.

[21] See *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, ed. by Margry; *The Making of Saints*, ed. by Hopgood.

[22] See Henry, *Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Irish Art*, III, which brings together in one volume eighteen of Henry's previously published articles, spanning decades; Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*.

[23] See Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, esp. chap. 7, for his adeptness at reconciling the material and historical sources. O'Brien, 'Pagan or Christian?' also effectively compares the archaeological and documentary evidence.

Grellan D. Rourke, Walter Horn, Claire Walsh, Jenny White Marshall, Jerry O'Sullivan, and John Sheehan.[24] Harbison's comprehensive overview of pilgrimage in medieval Ireland reveals the influence of the cults of saints and relics on the architecture and layout of ecclesiastical sites.[25] The detailed work on sites such as High Island, Skellig Michael, Illaunloughan, and Inishmurray has opened up the study of the cult of saints in Atlantic coastal and island monasteries. Arguably the most influential recent work on the cult of relics in Ireland, especially from an archaeological perspective, has been undertaken by Tomás Ó Carragáin. Inspired by John Crook's instructive study of the architectural setting of the saints on the Continent, he has set out to rectify the lack of reference to Ireland in that work.[26] Ó Carragáin's examination of Irish shrine chapels has forged the path for historical analysis into this lucrative area.[27]

In addition to research on the ecclesiastical sites, there has been a wealth of research published by archaeologists and art historians on the material artefacts pertaining to the cult of relics. Both George Coffey and H. S. Crawford took on the unenviable task of cataloguing the shrines and reliquaries of medieval Ireland.[28] Their detailed descriptions are invaluable, but given the dates of these studies, and the fact that some of the items named are now lost and others have been discovered, their work needs to be substantially revised. Raghnall Ó Floinn has gone some way to achieving this goal with his illustrated booklet on Irish reliquaries, focused on the treasures in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.[29] Most recently, art historian Karen Overbey has examined the key role played by shrines and reliquaries in shaping spatial identities in later medieval Ireland.[30] She also effectively consolidates and summarizes earlier analyses of Irish shrines and reliquaries into one beautifully illustrated volume.

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[24] Fanning, 'Excavation at Reask'; Herity, 'High Island Hermitage'; White Marshall and Rourke, *High Island*; Horn and others, *Forgotten Hermitage of Skellig Michael*; White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*; O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*; Sheehan, 'A Peacock's Tale'.

[25] Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*.

[26] Crook, *Architectural Setting*.

[27] Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting'. See also Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual Masonry Styles'; Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting of the Mass'; Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*.

[28] Coffey, *Guide to Celtic Antiquities*; Crawford, 'Descriptive List of Irish Shrines and Reliquaries'.

[29] Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries*. See also Ó Floinn, 'Insignia Columbae I'; Bourke, *Patrick*.

[30] Overbey, *Sacral Geographies*.

It is timely, therefore, to make a contribution from a historical perspective. The cult of relics in the first few centuries of the Irish Church has been often overlooked by scholars, in favour of the more productive eleventh and twelfth centuries. However, there are a few key articles. In a 1961 article Maurice Sheehy provided an insightful, albeit brief, account of the first relics brought into Ireland.[31] In a few short pages he succinctly examined the significance of the relics of the apostles in the growth of the early Irish Church. A. T. Lucas's comprehensive survey and catalogue of the different kinds of relics and their uses in medieval Ireland, despite its compressed nature, is still the best introduction to the cult of relics in Ireland.[32] He makes good use of the hagiographical and legal texts and makes clear definitions of the terminology, but provides more of a summary than a detailed exploration of the social and political role relics played in society. Again, some of the most useful work on the cult of relics in Ireland has been provided through examinations of particular saints' cults. Cogitosus's evocative description of the tomb of Brigit at Kildare is perhaps the most elaborate reflection of the cult of relics in early Ireland, and as such has attracted considerable attention from scholars.[33] Nevertheless, scholarly interest in the cult of Columba has arguably produced more effective analyses of the importance of saintly remains in the functioning of the early Irish Church and its interactions with society. For example, John Bannerman has shown the importance of the possession of the corporeal relics of Columba to the authority of his successor,[34] and Cormac Bourke's examination of the insignia of Columba reveals the symbolic role of associative relics in the early Irish Church.[35]

There are still very few dedicated historical examinations of the pivotal role played by the cult of relics, as a whole, in early Ireland. Charles Doherty provides a relative chronology for the use of relics in early Ireland and also highlights the ways in which they were used.[36] He shows how important it was to

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[31] Sheehy, 'Relics of the Apostles'.

[32] Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics'.

[33] See, for example, Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 145–46; Bitel, 'Ekphrasis at Kildare'; Neuman de Vegvar, 'Romanitas and Realpolitik'.

[34] Bannerman, '*Comarba Coluim Chille*'. See also O'Loughlin, 'The Tombs of the Saints'; MacDonald, 'When were St Columba's Corporeal Relics Enshrined?'.

[35] Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II'. See also MacDonald, 'Aspects of the Monastic Landscape'; Clancy, 'Personal, Political, Pastoral'; Clancy, 'Iona in the Kingdom of the Picts'.

[36] Doherty, 'Use of Relics'. See also Doherty, 'Basilica'; Doherty, 'Cult of St Patrick'; Doherty, 'The Earliest Cult of Macartan'.

the Irish Church to be associated with the Holy See in the seventh century. Primarily focused on the cult of Patrick, this discerning study reveals the intrinsic role relics played in the power politics of the early Irish Church, which was deeply influenced by continental practice. However, detailed as this examination may be, it is limited in length and scope and does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis of the topic. In the intervening thirty years few have taken up the proposal, clearly implied in this essay, to fully explore this fertile area of study. Jean-Michel Picard addresses the issue as part of a more global examination of the cult of relics, in a volume edited by Bozòky and Anne-Marie Helvétius.[37] The authors in this collection are unanimous in stressing the religious, social, and political importance of the cult of relics in the Middle Ages. They set out to highlight that relics should no longer be only studied for the artistic aspect of their shrines and reliquaries but also, and especially, for their role in the structuring of religious communities and society as a whole. Picard succeeds in this endeavour and places the Irish cult firmly within the continental milieu. Máire Herbert's analysis of the cult of relics in pre-Viking Ireland is the most recent historical contribution to this area.[38] Her typically subtle and perceptive examination of the hagiographical sources reveals the preoccupation with the memorialization of saints' remains in early Ireland. Again, however, her analysis is necessarily short and therefore, like the aforementioned articles, is unfortunately unable to provide the depth and detail warranted by this vast topic.

Following on from the work initiated by these historians, and inspired by the quality and scope of the continental studies, this book aims to redress the current imbalance by redirecting scholarly attention to a detailed analysis of the Irish documentary sources. This work is not an attempt to describe the nature of the cult of relics in Ireland as a whole; an effort to do so within one relatively short monograph would be unrealistic. Instead, the emphasis is on certain aspects of this cult, such as the role of corporeal relics and an exploration of the increasing use of relics in church administration and, accordingly, in the attaining and maintenance of jurisdiction and power. The base hypothesis for what follows is that by centring on particular aspects of the rise and function of relics over time, one may gain a better sense of how the Church established itself within Irish society. The material covered is, therefore, firmly rooted in the earliest sources from the early medieval period in Ireland, dating from the

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[37] Picard, 'Le culte des reliques'.

[38] Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies'.

fifth to ninth centuries, with a particular focus on developments in the seventh-
and eighth-century Church.

Writing in the late twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis criticized what he
viewed as an unhealthy obsession in medieval Ireland with the cult of relics.[39]
He laid particular stress on the exalted role of associative items such as bells
and other metal objects. Despite the difficulty in trusting Giraldus as a reli-
able witness,[40] his impression of the superior status of these secondary relics is
one that still pervades modern interpretations of the cult of relics in Ireland.[41]
Perhaps due to their tangible, precious, and portable nature reliquaries have
received much more attention from scholars than corporeal relics. Specialists
in the field have increasingly, if not in every case, eschewed such an approach,
though among the wider community of historians and the general public it
shows signs of staying power. Accordingly, scholars such as Sheehy, Doherty,
Bannerman, Picard, and Herbert acknowledge and appreciate both the role of
corporeal relics and the extensive links between Ireland and the Continent in
the early Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it has been argued that Ireland was slow
to adopt relics, in particular that Irish Christians were not as concerned with
venerating bodily remains as their late Roman and Frankish contemporaries.
For instance, Nathalie Stalmans identifies a scarcity of evidence in early Irish
hagiography for the existence of pilgrimage to the graves of the saints, and a
lack of a belief in the curative power of corporeal relics.[42] Similarly, Thomas
Charles-Edwards explains that the Irish 'did not have a custom of enshrining
the earthly remains of dead holy men' and that they were 'slow to show any
interest in the cult of bodily relics'.[43] Furthermore, in an analysis of the early
linguistic evidence, Richard Sharpe detects less emphasis on corporeal relics in
Ireland compared to contemporary Gaul and England, particularly in relation
to the custom of *translatio*.[44] Alan Thacker identifies key episodes in the sev-

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[39] Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, ed. by Dimock, 33 (p. 179).

[40] For example, see O'Meara's discussion in his translation of *The History and Topography
of Ireland*, pp. 13–17. Stewart, 'Topographia Hiberniae', pp. 644–57, provides a full assessment
of Giraldus as a source.

[41] For example, see Overbey, *Sacral Geographies*.

[42] Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande*, pp. 128–30, 266.

[43] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 348, 350. In this assessment he is
apparently following Clare Stancliffe (*The Earliest Irish Saints' Lives*) whose exploration of the
topic is still forthcoming and therefore unavailable for analysis.

[44] Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 152.

enth-century sources that explicitly stress the importance of corporeal remains in Irish Christianity; however, he suspects that these events were 'distinctly episodic'.[45] The most recent work on this topic perpetuates the notion that the Irish were relatively unconcerned with corporeal relics. Karen Overbey, quoting Thacker and Charles-Edwards, states that 'there was very little emphasis on corporeal enshrinement in Ireland' and 'references to saints' bodies as relics are very rare'.[46] She concludes that 'whatever the means by which non-corporeal relics advanced as the primary model in Ireland, notions of sanctity, as well as of place, came to be located at least as much outside the body as inside'.[47] At the core of the present study is an interrogation of this idea that the cult of non-corporeal relics was the primary model in Ireland. The key issue is one of chronology. If Ireland in the twelfth century was disproportionately concerned with associative relics, we must start at the beginnings of the Church in Ireland to ascertain how it evolved in this way.

A worthwhile approach is via the language. Few historians or linguists have examined the cult of relics, especially for the early period. My research into the role of relics has revealed the extensive vocabulary of relics used by the early Irish. As the research progressed it became quite clear that this was a relatively untapped and rich area of study. By fully comprehending both the Latin and vernacular words used by Irish authors to describe the variety and veneration of relics we can gain a valuable insight into the significance and use of these relics in the early Irish Church. It is only through a detailed analysis of the specific references that the nuances within the cult of relics will be revealed. By an exploration of the language of texts I have identified that the primary terms for relics are as follows: the Latin terms *reliquiae*, *martyr* (and its variants), and *insignia*; and the vernacular terms *mind*, *fethal*, *taise*, *reilic*, and *martre* (and its variants). In order to arrive at a more instructive lexicon for the cult of relics in medieval Ireland these terms, along with others pertaining to the cult of relics in general (such as *basilica* and *memra*), are analysed in the Appendix. It is important to determine what exactly was meant by each word in order to fully appreciate its use in a certain context, and possibly more importantly, to ascertain why certain words were used instead of the other alternatives. The purpose of the Appendix is not to list or indeed to analyse every reference to relics in all Irish texts over the period under study. It is an overview of the terms used in

[45] Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', p. 36.

[46] Overbey, *Sacral Geographies*, p. 5.

[47] Overbey, *Sacral Geographies*, p. 6.

the sources and an attempt to arrive at a glossary. A key concern here is whether we can differentiate between native and imported terms, and between terms for corporeal and non-corporeal relics. Most of the references mentioned in this Appendix are discussed in more detail contextually, throughout the work.

Relics and the Late Antique World

Antecedents, Comparative Religions, and Modern Manifestations

In order to fully understand the role relics played in early Irish society it is first necessary to examine the motivations behind the cult and the history of relic veneration on the Continent, in general.[1] Knowledge of this background is necessary to provide a framework within which we can place Irish developments.[2]

As the veneration of saints and their remains tends to feature in most faiths and religions, the tangibility of these cults must satisfy some basic human need or desire.[3] Fittingly, therefore, Stephen Wilson's collection on saints' cults, while focusing on Christianity, also includes chapters on 'patriot saints' in the French Revolution and Muslim saints in Nepal and northern India.[4] The antecedents to the Christian worship of relics are clearly discernible in an investigation of the cult of the hero in ancient Greece.[5] Often, a type of chapel was erected over a dead hero, or he was buried in a grand shrine within a temple. Devotees paid homage at his tomb, though the bodily remains were usually not visible. There are also instances in which the ancient Greeks housed relics

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[1] As this chapter is included only to provide context for the Irish material, much of the content is not original. For this reason, and for economy, the primary source quotes are only provided in translation.

[2] Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', provides a very useful overview of continental developments.

[3] See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 47.

[4] Wilson, *Saints and their Cults*.

[5] For an introduction to this cult, see MacCulloch, 'Relics'.

in reliquaries. The alleged shoulder blade of Pelops and the bones of Tantalus were both preserved in bronze vessels.[6] Veneration of the corporeal remains of the heroes was thought to ensure safety, so these relics were highly sought after. Plutarch records how the relics of Theseus were solemnly translated with great ceremony from Scyros to Athens.[7] In an episode that shares many similarities with later Christian accounts of holy translations, a miracle revealed the initial location of Theseus's tomb: 'Cimon [...] saw an eagle in a place where there was the semblance of a mound [...] By some divine ordering he comprehended the meaning of this and dug there, and there was found a coffin'.[8] When Cimon brought these relics home on his trireme, the Athenians were thrilled, and received them with 'splendid processions and sacrifices'.[9] Secondary items associated with dead heroes were also revered in ancient Greece, such as the sceptre of Agamemnon in Chaeronea.[10]

There are inevitably comparisons to be made between the pagan practices in the cult of the hero and the veneration of saints' relics in the early Christian Church. Herrmann-Mascard and Brown have explored these similarities in detail and both conclude that the Christian practice was not simply adapted from the pagan.[11] To describe the veneration of the saints as a continuation of the pagan cult of heroes is to misunderstand a crucial feature of the Christian cult. Saints and martyrs had a close connection with God because they died as human beings. The saints were, therefore, perfectly poised as intercessors between mortals and God.[12] Hippolyte Delehaye maintained that the cult of relics is an outcome not of hero-worship, but of reverence for the martyr.[13] There was a logical and parallel development of the two cults, without interdependence, which was simply the natural result of an identical attitude produced in similar conditions.

[6] MacCulloch, 'Relics', p. 651. Cf. the Irish poem *The Reliquary of Adamnán*, which includes a shoulder blade in the list of relics supposedly possessed by Iona, Gwynn, 'The Reliquary of Adamnán', p. 210.

[7] Plutarch, *Theseus*, ed. and trans. by Perrin, 36 (pp. 82–87).

[8] Plutarch, *Theseus*, ed. and trans. by Perrin, 36 (pp. 84–85).

[9] Plutarch, *Theseus*, ed. and trans. by Perrin, 36 (pp. 84–85).

[10] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. by Taylor, IX, 40 (p. 99).

[11] See Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*; Brown, *Cult of the Saints*.

[12] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 5–6.

[13] Delehaye, *Legends*, pp. 129–31.

Modern secular cults are developed from an analogous impetus. By way of shrines, pilgrimages, and popular devotion secular heroes and celebrities become like saints. Major political leaders and folk heroes, such as Eva Perón and Che Guevara, are ripe targets for relic cults, especially in native areas where the struggle of these individuals resonates with the local community.[14] Elvis Presley has attracted a huge cult following since his death in 1976 and millions travel every year to visit his shrine at Graceland. Many of his followers view him as a modern-day saint who bridges the gap between God and mere mortals. Like religious saints, Elvis is viewed as an intercessor and his relics are believed by some to contain special powers.[15] The high volume of visitors to the grave in Père Lachaise of Jim Morrison again reflects the potential for cultic power of musicians in modern society.[16] Furthermore, Nina Tumarkin and Steve Smith have shown how the relic cult of Lenin in Soviet Russia was hugely popular, despite an apparently hostile ideological climate.[17]

Even though Judaism's laws concerning the treatment of human remains militate against relic cults, the Old Testament provides an account of the efficacy of the relics of the prophet and miracle-worker Elisha:[18]

> Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.[19]

Liturgical texts such as the Torah and Talmud scrolls are also regarded as sacred, less because of their materiality as artefacts than because of their content as scripture.[20] Likewise, in Islam, the human body is considered inviolable and interference with corpses is discouraged for fear of contamination. Despite this, veneration of both the corporeal and associative relics of the prophet Muham-

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[14] See Misemer, *Secular Saints*; Guy, 'Life and the Commodification of Death'; Dosal, 'The Resurrection of Che Guevara'.

[15] See Doss, 'Believing in Elvis'; Doss, 'Popular Culture Canonization'.

[16] See Margry, 'The Pilgrimage to Jim Morrison's Grave'.

[17] See Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*; Smith, 'Bones of Contention'.

[18] Human corpses are deemed 'unclean' in Judaism. See 'The Rules of Uncleanness', in *The Mishnah*, trans. by Danby, pp. 800–04.

[19] II Kings 13. 20–21.

[20] Strong, 'Relics', p. 276.

mad remains a popular form of Islamic devotion.[21] Similarly, while Buddhism shares with many other religious traditions an emphasis on the impurity and impermanence of human remains, these views have not proved incompatible with the veneration of the relics of Buddha.[22]

Early Martyrs

The Christian cult of the saints began with the adoration of martyrs in the early centuries after the death of Christ. One of the earliest cults was that of Ignatius of Antioch who was sacrificed to wild animals in the Colosseum *c.* 108, on account of his beliefs.[23] On his way to Rome from Antioch he wrote a number of letters, recorded by Eusebius, in which he invited martyrdom.[24] According to an alleged first-hand account of his death, his remains were gathered up by his followers and returned to Antioch.[25] Regardless of the veracity of this testimony, we do know from Jerome that Ignatius's remains were translated to Antioch before 392.[26]

The earliest surviving piece of Christian hagiography, *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, records both the preservation of the martyr's body as a relic and the celebration of the day of his death as a feast.[27] Early Christians had adopted the Graeco-Roman practice of holding meals at graves, especially on the deceased's birthday.[28] However, this ritual gained newfound significance to early Christians, believing as they did in eternal life, so they celebrated the anniversary of the martyr's death as a true *dies natalis*. As bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp was burned at the stake in *c.* 155/6.[29] His followers managed to retrieve and preserve his bones after his martyrdom:

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[21] See Meri, 'Re-appropriating Sacred Space'; Meri, *Cult of Saints in Medieval Syria*; Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*; Goldziher, 'The Cult of Saints in Islam'; Margoliouth, 'The Relics of the Prophet Mohammed'.

[22] See Scharf, 'On the Allure of Buddhist Relics'; Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, pp. 2–5.

[23] Delehaye, *Origines du culte*, p. 16.

[24] Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, ed. by Walsh, 4 (p. 109).

[25] *Relation of the Martyrdom of St Ignatius*, ed. by Wake, 12 (p. 281).

[26] Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, ed. by Migne, xvi (cols 666–67).

[27] *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, ed. and trans. by Musurillo.

[28] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 37–41.

[29] Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, p. xiii.

collecting the remains that were dearer to us than precious stones and finer than gold, we buried them in a fitting spot. Gathering here, so far as we can, in joy and gladness, we will be allowed by the Lord to celebrate the anniversary day of his martyrdom.[30]

Out of this practice a new literary culture was created. The *acta* of the martyrs were accounts of suffering, trial, and death.[31] They often included accounts of relic collection. *Acta* also had a commemorative function since they were read aloud to a community on the anniversary of the death, often at the location of the relics or tomb of the martyr. This is related by Tertullian, who records the evolution of the celebration of the martyr's birthday at his or her tomb from a private to a public affair.[32]

Another account of martyrdom reveals an early elaboration of the cult of relics to include items that came into contact with the body. During the suffering of Perpetua, Felicity, and their companions in the arena in Carthage *c.* 203, one of the martyrs, Saturus, dipped the ring of the kind soldier Pudens into his blood and handed it back to him as a *pignus* and a *memoria sanguinis*.[33] In this way, 'contact' relics became an intrinsic component of the cult of relics. The blood or ashes of the early martyrs were often gathered up in napkins or small pieces of material. In some cases these fragments, termed *brandea*, *palliola*, and *sanctuaria*, were simply brought into contact with the body or tomb of the saint.

The Fourth Century: Rome and the Rapid Evolution of Practice

In the wake of the Edict of Milan in 313, and other official recognitions of Christianity, the public cult of the saints attained full acceptance and began to quickly evolve. This growth is reflected in the edicts of the council of bishops in Gangra (*c.* 340),[34] which decreed excommunication for any Christian who

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[30] *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, ed. and trans. by Musurillo, 18.2–3 (pp. 16–17).

[31] See Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, for twenty-eight such texts and translations detailing the lives and deaths of over forty martyrs.

[32] Tertullian, *The Chaplet or De Corona,* trans. by Roberts and Donaldson, 3 (p. 94).

[33] *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, ed. and trans. by Musurillo, 21.5 (pp. 130–31).

[34] The actual date could have been any time between 325 and 381. For discussion, see Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 89.

did not support assemblies in honour of the martyrs.[35] Over the course of the
fourth century, large churches were built at the shrines of martyrs. Here, as
in other aspects of Christianity, the newly converted Emperor Constantine
took the lead, building an influential shrine church over the tomb of Peter.[36]
With the end of the persecutions a new breed of saint emerged. These were
men and women who led a life of virtue and self-denial or provided an inspi-
rational example to others. The central belief here was that these 'confessors'
achieved an especially close relationship with God through the manner of their
life, rather than that of their death. Thus, these men and women possessed spe-
cial saintly powers of healing and protection.

Rome, as capital of the empire and as seat of the head of the Western
Church, was the centre of the cult of the saints. Rome guarded the bodies of the
great apostles Peter and Paul, and witnessed the martyrdoms of many men and
women in the Colosseum during the persecutions. In *c.* 333 Eusebius recorded
the vital role relics played in connecting Peter to Rome:

> his memory should be more celebrated among the Romans, than that of those of
> former times, so that he should be considered worthy of an honourable sepulchre
> in the very front of their city; and, that great multitudes of the Roman Empire
> should run to it, as to a great asylum and temple of God.[37]

The actions of the enterprising Pope Damasus in the late fourth century
revealed the political potential of the veneration of the remains of these holy
men. During his reign Damasus consolidated theories of papal primacy. As
the only apostolic Church in the West it was Rome's claims on St Peter that
ultimately led to the primacy of the bishop of Rome over those of other prov-
inces.[38] As part of Damasus's policy of glorifying the city as true head of the
Western Church, he vigorously promoted the cults of the Roman saints by
repairing catacomb tombs, initiating organized worship, and creating poeti-
cal epitaphs for the sacred remains.[39] Rome soon became the primary locus of
sanctity and, accordingly, a major pilgrimage site.

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[35] 'The Council of Gangra AD 325–381', trans. by Percival, canon xx (p. 100).

[36] Toynbee and Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter*, esp. pp. 195–211; Krautheimer,
Early Christian Architecture, pp. 32–36.

[37] Eusebius, *Theophania*, trans. by Lee, IV, 7 (p. 221).

[38] Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy*, p. 10; Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, p. 24.

[39] See Trout, 'Damasus and the Invention of Early Christian Rome'.

The work of the Christian poet Prudentius provides an interesting insight into the glory of Rome, from the perspective of a cultured devotee in a vital period for the growth of martyr cults in the West. His *Liber Peristephanon*, written *c*. 405, contains fourteen lyric poems on Spanish and Roman martyrs.[40] Michael Roberts draws attention to the way Prudentius utilized the paradigm of the martyr cult to convey the symbolic status of Rome.[41] Prudentius referred to Rome as 'celestial' and 'mighty' on account of the numerous shrines and tombs of saints: 'scarce it is known even in remote parts, how full is Rome of saints, how richly her city's soil flourishes in holy sepulchres'.[42] The *Liber Peristephanon* is a moving testament to the evolution and power of the cult of relics. In particular, in *The Passion of the Holy Martyr Vincent* Prudentius stresses the dedicated devotion of early Christians to the physical remains of the saint.[43]

The cult of relics was criticized from its inception by purists who regarded it as pagan. At the start of the fifth century, Vigilantius of Calagurris was an outspoken opponent of the veneration of relics.[44] Unfortunately, his work is only known through the writings of Jerome who vehemently attacked Vigilantius's statements. In books that have not survived but which, according to the outraged Jerome, 'he vomited forth in a drunken fit',[45] Vigilantius argued that the devotion shown to the bones and ashes of the martyrs was idolatry.[46] He also apparently opposed the practice of all-night vigils in the basilicas of the martyrs.[47] In defence of these practices, Jerome stated the classic justification of such cults; that relics were not worshipped themselves, but were an aid to the veneration of martyrs of undoubted holiness, whose lives were a model for later generations:

> We, it is true, refuse to worship or adore, I say not the relics of the martyrs, but even the sun and moon, the angels and archangels, the Cherubim and Seraphim and 'every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come'. For we may not 'serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever'.

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[40] Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, ed. by Bergman.

[41] See Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*.

[42] Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, ed. by Bergman, Hymn II, ll. 541–44.

[43] Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, ed. by Bergman, Hymn V, e.g. ll. 561–64.

[44] See Hunter, 'Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen', pp. 419–29.

[45] Jerome, 'Against Vigilantius', ed. by Fremantle and others, 3 (p. 418).

[46] Jerome, 'Letter CIX. To Riparius', 1, and 'Against Vigilantius', 1, ed. by Fremantle and others, pp. 212, 417.

[47] Jerome, 'Letter CIX. To Riparius', 1, and 'Against Vigilantius', 1, ed. by Fremantle and others, pp. 212, 417.

> Still we honour the relics of the martyrs, that we may adore Him whose martyrs they are. We honour the servants that their honour may be reflected upon their Lord who Himself says: — 'he that receiveth you receiveth me'. I ask Vigilantius, Are the relics of Peter and of Paul unclean? Was the body of Moses unclean, of which we are told (according to the correct Hebrew text) that it was buried by the Lord Himself? And do we, every time that we enter the basilicas of apostles and prophets and martyrs, pay homage to the shrines of idols?[48]

Debates of this sort reflect the growing popularity of the cult of relics by the late fourth century.

Contact Relics and Fragmented Remains

As the cult of the saints grew with the Christian Church the need became apparent to regulate and prescribe procedures regarding relics. Despite prohibitions in Roman law concerning interference with human remains and the inviolability of tombs, Christians treated saints' corpses as cult objects that could be exhumed, moved, and dismembered according to religious needs.[49] The Law of Theodosius I, promulgated in 386, provides early evidence for the dismemberment of saintly bodies. This law forbade the translation of a body already buried and the buying or selling of martyrial remains. It also forbade the transfer or distribution of bodies of martyrs or parts thereof, although it did allow for the erection of *martyria* over the tombs of saints.[50] Theodosius II published this law in 438, in a volume that gathered together the laws of the Christian Roman emperors since Constantine.[51] This *Codex Theodosianus* reveals that the interference with tombs was becoming increasingly problematic, and the penalties associated with the violation of these burials were clearly not acting as effective deterrents. The failure on the part of the law to control relic veneration in this manner highlights the potent lure of the cult of relics and its resonance with the general populace. The growing abuse of relics is also evident in the writings of Augustine. In his treatise on the work of monks Augustine criticizes hypocrites who travel through the provinces dressed as

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[48] Jerome, 'Letter CIX. To Riparius', ed. by Fremantle and others, 1 (p. 212).

[49] Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, pp. 43, 48–49; Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 29–32.

[50] *Codex Theodosianus*, IX, 17.7, quoted in Harries, 'Death and the Dead in the Late Roman West', p. 63.

[51] See *The Theodosian Code*, ed. by Harries and Wood.

monks, under no law, supervision, or discipline, selling the relics of martyrs or so-called martyrs.[52]

The custom of dividing the bodies of the martyrs into fragments, each one of which was thought to retain the virtue of the saint, was introduced very early in the East. Theodoret claimed that 'in the divided body, the grace is not divided, and the fragments, however small they may be, have the same virtue as the body when intact'.[53] Some of the churches in the West accepted relics that were distributed by the Eastern Christians, even though these were reportedly taken from the bodies of saints in defiance of law and respect for the martyrs. But they themselves abstained for a long time from dividing and disseminating the bones of saints. In Rome they distributed contact relics (*brandea, sanctuaria, pignora*) instead, which, for example, had touched the keys of the tomb of the Apostle, the filings of the chains of St Peter, or fragments of the grill of St Lawrence.[54] Elsewhere, as in Africa, clothing placed on the grave, flowers in contact with the hallowed shrine, or the oil of the sanctuary all served as relics. However, the Greeks were not content with these *pignora*. They viewed these as far inferior to the corporeal remains of the saint and they did not observe the same laws governing graves and corpses as in Rome. Due to the strict Roman laws regarding interference with the dead, these 'contact relics' were a safe substitute for corporeal relics. Tombs were adapted to facilitate this veneration: a window was fitted in the shrine of St Peter to allow the faithful to view the saint's remains. Gregory of Tours wrote how cloths lowered onto the tomb were perceived as being brought up heavy with the blessing of St Peter.[55] The practice was immortalized in poetry by Prudentius: 'many dip linen cloths, in the dripping blood, to keep as holy protection in their homes, for their descendants'.[56] 'As a result, the Christian world came to be covered with tiny fragments of original relics and with "contact relics" held, as in the case of St Peter, to be as full of his *praesentia* as any physical remains.'[57]

Although the veneration of contact relics became a cornerstone of cultic devotion in the West, there was some hostility to the concept. Persistent critic

[52] Augustine, *De opere monachorum*, ed. by Zycher, pp. 590–91.

[53] Theodoret, *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, ed. by Raedar, I, 8; trans by MacCulloch, 'Relics', p. 654.

[54] For further details, see Delehaye, *Origines du culte*, pp. 64–65; Meinardus, 'Relics of Saints of the Greek Orthodox Church'.

[55] See Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ed. by Krusch, 27 (pp. 53–54).

[56] Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, ed. by Bergman, Hymn v, ll. 341–44.

[57] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, p. 88.

Vigilantius dismissed the worshipping and kissing of paltry bits of 'powder wrapped up in a costly cloth' as heathen ceremonies.[58] He argued that saints were not all pervading and could not leave their own tombs and be present wheresoever they wished. Again, Jerome defended the sanctity of contact relics by repeatedly quoting from the Bible.[59] Like others, he argued that the power of the saint was as great in a fragment as in the entire body. Victricius of Rouen and Paulinus of Nola defended the power of these minute relics. Victricius asserted that the full weight of wonderworking power was present in such fragments and that, by these relics, saints could transcend time and place.[60] He endeavoured to provide a theological explanation for the power of contact relics, arguing that relics of the saints are effectively consubstantial with God and, therefore, are wholly present in every single fragment:[61] 'We proclaim with all our faith and authority that there is nothing in relics which is not complete. Where the healing power is intact, the limbs are intact'.[62] Paulinus of Nola agreed, claiming that

> the grace which flows from an interred saint is not confined to where his whole body lies. Wherever there is part of the blessed body [...] in even the least dust of the saints, great power proclaims the potency of the apostolic remains.[63]

Augustine testified to the miraculous power of such relics, claiming that a blind man was cured by means of a handkerchief that touched the bodies of Sts Gervasius and Protasius in Milan.[64] In the last book of *City of God*, Augustine presents a dossier of miracles that happened within his lifetime, through the

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[58] Jerome, 'Against Vigilantius', ed. by Fremantle and others, 4 (p. 418).

[59] Jerome, 'Against Vigilantius', ed. by Fremantle and others, 6 (p. 419).

[60] Victricius, *De laude sanctorum*, 9 (pp. 82–84); trans. by Clark in 'Victricius of Rouen', pp. 390–91.

[61] Victricius, *De laude sanctorum*, 8 (pp. 81–82); trans. by Clark in 'Victricius of Rouen', pp. 387–88; Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen', p. 367. Similarly, in his analysis of the anthropological basis for religious beliefs and traditions Emile Durkheim (*Elementary Forms*, p. 229) explained that when 'a sacred thing is subdivided, each of its parts remains equal to the thing itself [...] The debris of a relic has the same virtue as a relic in good condition. The smallest drop of blood contains the same active principle as the whole thing.'

[62] Victricius, *De laude sanctorum*, 9, ll. 30–31 (pp. 83–84); trans. by Clark in 'Victricius of Rouen', p. 390.

[63] Paulinus, *Carmina*, ed. by de Hartel, Carmen 27 (pp. 281–82).

[64] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, 8.

relics of the martyrs.[65] In fact, a change of mood regarding relics is evident in Augustine from 401 to 422.[66] His account of the relics of the first martyr Stephen at Calama and Hippo mentions at least seventy miracles that took place in the years immediately after the arrival of the relics.[67] Relics of St Stephen spread over the Mediterranean very quickly, after their discovery in 415.[68] Clearly conscious of the opposition in some quarters to the worship of the martyrs, Augustine was careful to assert that worshipping saints was not idolatry but the worship of God. He explains that these miracles are performed in Christ's name and bear witness to faith in Christ. In this way, 'the acts said to be done by the martyrs are in fact done in answer to their prayers, not through their direct activity'.[69]

Even items associated with the saint during his lifetime became relics, such as his books, vestments, or ecclesiastical instruments. As early as the late fourth century St John Chrysostom glorified these objects: 'O how great is the virtue of the Saints! Not only their words; not only their bodies, but even their very garments are always esteemed venerable by the whole creation'.[70] Similarly, in the sixth century Gregory the Great sent a fragment of the *pallium* of Peter to a bishop as a relic.[71] Adomnán provides a late seventh-century Irish account of the veneration of associative relics in the Holy Land.[72] He describes a chapel near the basilica of Golgotha, which houses the sponge that was put to the lips of Jesus on the cross. The sponge is preserved in a reliquary with a perforated lid, through which it can be touched and kissed by pilgrims.[73] Furthermore, the shroud in which the Lord was buried is contained in a shrine in another church and is periodically elevated and displayed for the adoration of the masses.[74] A mantle woven by the Virgin Mary was similarly venerated.[75]

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[65] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII.

[66] Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 148–49.

[67] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, 8.

[68] For a discussion of the cult of St Stephen, see Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 211–20; Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', pp. 12–14.

[69] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, 9.

[70] Chrysostom, 'The Homilies on the Statues', trans. by Stephens, Homily VIII, 3 (p. 396).

[71] Gregory the Great, *Epistola* II, referenced in Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I*, p. 207.

[72] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. by Meehan.

[73] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. by Meehan, I, 7 (p. 50).

[74] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. by Meehan, I, 9 (pp. 52, 54).

[75] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. by Meehan, I, 10 (p. 56).

Translatio*, Church Consecration, and the Activities of Ambrose of Milan*

Increasingly, the veneration of saints became a fundamental focus of early Christianity and rituals and ceremonies were conceived to express and facilitate this cultic devotion. One custom to grow out of this need was *translatio*. The translating of an individual's body from one burial place to another, usually grander, location was often a crucial component in the creation of a saint. The accompanying ceremony invited the laity into the process and gave them the opportunity to partake in the glorification. The earliest recorded *translatio* of relics was that of St Babylas of Antioch. Constantius Gallus had the relics of St Babylas translated into a new church in Daphne, built in honour of the bishop *c.* 351. This, apparently, was an attempt by Gallus to clean up what he viewed as the morally corrupt town and to counteract the power of the oracle in the temple of Apollo.[76] The body of Babylas was translated again soon after by the Emperor Julian in 362 when, according to Chrysostom, he felt the proximity of the relics was interfering with his ability to commune with the oracle in the temple.[77] In accounts of translations we are frequently given an impression of a notable outpouring of devotion, and miracles that accompany these translations are portrayed as a testament to the power of the saint as well as the faith of the gathered crowds. Brown observes that translations of relics came to 'hold the centre stage in late antique and early medieval piety' and that they allowed for public displays of piety and belief.[78] Likewise, Heinzelmann showed that whilst complex, the evolution of the *translatio* account had a definable context. Just as the cult of the saints had its antecedents in the pre-Christian imperial world, so too did the popular reception of relics on their arrival at a new site following translation.[79] For Heinzelmann, as for Brown, when people lined the streets or gathered in huge numbers to witness the arrival of a saint, they did so in remembrance of the Roman *adventus* ceremony that welcomed the emperor into his cities.[80]

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, played a key role in the evolution of the cult of relics by popularizing the disinterment and circulation of saints' remains in

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[76] Chrysostom, 'On the Holy Martyr, S. Babylas', trans. by Stephens, 2–3 (pp. 142–43). See also Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Walford, v, 2 (pp. 201–05).

[77] Chrysostom, 'On the Holy Martyr, S. Babylas', trans. by Stephens, 3 (p. 143).

[78] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, p. 88.

[79] Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*, p. 122.

[80] Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*, pp. 66–77; Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 89–101.

the late fourth century. Despite some fierce opposition, he championed the distribution of relics on a large scale.[81] The effusive letter of gratitude written by Victricius of Rouen indicates that the Bishop sent him an impressive range of relics as gifts.[82] Ambrose clearly understood the power of relics in building social networks and creating binding reciprocal relationships. A gift of relics caused no loss to the saint or the donor, but rather made a special connection with the recipient. The relics sent to Victricius were mainly comprised of ashes, dust, and material soaked in blood. Controversially, some of the relics distributed by Ambrose may have included bone fragments — presumably obtained from the East where the dismembering of bodies became commonplace from the fourth century — which was still technically forbidden in the West.[83]

Ambrose also appears to have popularized the use of relics for church consecration. In a letter to his sister Marcellina in 386 he explains how the people of Milan appealed to him to consecrate the new basilica with relics of the holy martyrs, in the manner in which he consecrated the Roman Basilica. Ambrose agreed to the request if only he could find relics of martyrs. Consequently, the Bishop miraculously (and very conveniently), discovered the bodies of obscure martyrs Gervasius and Protasius:

> And at once I was seized, as it were, with a great presentiment of some sort of divine sign. [...] All the bones were perfect, and there was much blood. [...] On the following day we translated the relics to the basilica called Ambrosian. During the translation a blind man was healed.[84]

Paulinus of Nola also glorified this marvellous event:

> the holy martyrs Protasius and Gervasius revealed themselves to the priest. [...] When the bodies of the holy martyrs were lifted up and placed on biers, many who were possessed by the devil were exorcised.[85]

In this way, Ambrose became the champion of the *inventio* and *translatio* of relics, that is, the discovering, exhuming, and translating of the remains of the

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[81] For example, from Vigilantius of Calagurris. See Hunter, 'Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen', pp. 421–25.

[82] See Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen'.

[83] For an excellent summary of Ambrose and the cult of relics, see Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', pp. 5–11.

[84] Ambrose, *Epistles*, trans. by Beyenka, Epistle 61 (p. 376). Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, 8, corroborates this account.

[85] Paulinus, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, ed. by Migne, 14 (col. 34).

martyrs. After Gervasius and Protasius he also translated St Nazarius into the Basilica Apostolorum, and directed the *inventio* and *translatio* in Bologna of Sts Vitalis and Agricola.[86] Milan was capital of the Western Roman Empire in Ambrose's time and was, therefore, at the heart of imperial politics. It was a volatile time as the orthodox Church attempted to impose its beliefs as standard on other Christian sects, in particular the Arians. Ambrose emerged in the 380s as the leading Western spokesman for the Nicene position.[87] Control over the church buildings and basilicas became a major source of conflict in this controversy between Ambrose and the Arian emperor Valentinian. One of the best examples of Ambrose's use of liturgical authority to create political power lies in his use of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius.[88]

This discovery of the burial places of saints and martyrs with the aid of dreams and visions became a common feature of the cult of relics. Typically, the dead man (or woman) appeared in an apparition to a bishop or priest to reveal the previously unknown location of their resting place, so that their bones could be removed to a more fitting site or a shrine built over the grave.[89] This would ensure prayers and due veneration would be afforded to them. This tradition dated from at least as early as ancient Greece. Christian leaders understood the political benefit of the discovery and *translatio* of the once lost relics of martyrs and saints, as we have seen with Ambrose. However, he was not the only one to receive such divine intervention. Sozomen reports many instances in his *Ecclesiastical History*. For example, visions aided the exposition of relics of the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah appeared in the dreams of the peasant cultivating the land under which he was buried. He instructed the man: 'Go, dig in that garden [...] you will there find two coffins, the inner one of wood, the other of lead'.[90] In accordance with the usual *topos* governing the recitation of such discoveries, the martyr's body had not decayed:

> Although the prophet had lain under the earth for so many generations, he appeared sound; his hair was closely shorn, his nose was straight; his beard mod-

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[86] Paulinus, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, ed. by Migne, 14 (col. 34), 32 (col. 40), 33 (col. 41).

[87] See Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts*, for a full account and analysis of this conflict and its role in Ambrose's career.

[88] McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p. 236.

[89] For example, see Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Walford, ix, 2. (pp. 407–09).

[90] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Walford, ix, 7 (p. 423).

erately grown, his head quite short, his eyes rather sunken, and concealed by the eyebrows.[91]

Soon after Ambrose's pioneering use of saints' remains many new churches sought relics and appealed to Rome for the *brandea* of Peter and Paul. Robert Markus explains that Ambrose's actions were truly revolutionary, not just because they breached the prohibitions on interfering with burials. The novelty lay in the fact that he placed the relics beneath the altar.[92] The relics of the saints were thus brought into close physical association with the regular public worship of the community. They were no longer just part of the — often raucous — rituals of family remembrance in the suburban cemeteries, or even simply ignored or forgotten. They were venerated 'soberly, properly and publicly in their own church'.[93] The significance of Ambrose's deeds cannot be overstated. The confirmation and elaboration of this intrinsic connection between relics and the Eucharist and between the remains of the saint and the altar became a key feature of church consecration and layout. Ambrose also arranged to have his body interred in pride of place in his basilica, next to the remains of Sts Gervasius and Protasius. Burials *ad martyres* or *ad sanctos* became a major feature of the cult of the saints and this practice deeply influenced the development of ecclesiastical architecture.[94] However, internment next to saints' graves was not initially accepted wholeheartedly. While Paulinus of Nola assumed that burial next to the saints was a beneficial practice, he sought advice on the issue from his friend Augustine. In response, Augustine wrote a somewhat critical treatise of burial *ad sanctos*.[95] He argued that it would be advantageous to be buried near martyrs only on the basis that the prayers offered by the faithful there would be more effective:

> Truly the fact that one is buried in a memorial of a martyr seems to me to benefit the dead only in this respect, namely, that in commending the dead to the patronage of the martyr the desire for supplicating on his behalf is increased.[96]

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[91] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Walford, ix, 7 (p. 424).

[92] Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 144–45.

[93] Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 145.

[94] See Grabar, *Martyrium*; Crook, *Architectural Setting*.

[95] Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, ed. by Zycha. For context and commentary, see Rose, *Commentary on Augustine's De cura pro mortuis gerenda*.

[96] Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, ed. by Zycha, p. 659.

Sixth Century and Beyond: Consolidation of Practice

The fragmentation of saints' remains facilitated the increasing mobility of relics. However, the writings of Gregory the Great, a pope who presided over a period of rapid change regarding the cult of relics in the sixth century, indicate the difficulties the official Roman Church had with justifying and sanctioning any interference with saints' remains. Although translations and dismemberment had been taking place in parts of the Western Church since the late fourth century, Gregory was still shocked when Constantina (wife of the eastern emperor Maurice) requested the head of St Paul, or some other portion of his body, in order to endow her newly built church with a worthy relic.[97] Gregory refused and explained that the custom in Rome was to put a *brandeum* in a box, which was then placed next to the body of the saint. This item, claimed Gregory, was just as powerful as the saint's corpse itself. Indeed, he recounted how a previous pope, Leo I, dealt with disbelievers. He proved the authenticity of these cloths by severing one with scissors, causing blood to flow from the cut.[98] Translations did eventually take place in Rome in the seventh century and again in the eighth.[99] However, the strategy of distributing *brandea* and *sanctuaria* (as Gregory often called them) in place of actual parts of the bodies of saints came to be the normal practice of the popes in the early Middle Ages. Relics served specific political purposes for Gregory.[100] These Roman contact relics, or *ersatzreliquien* as Heinzelmann termed them, were distributed widely as treasured gifts that created a formal bond between the recipient and the Holy See.[101]

The donation or exchange of relics between ecclesiastical and secular leaders played an important role in late antique diplomacy. In his study of the influence of Pulcheria in her brother Emperor Theodosius II's war with Persia in 421–22, Kenneth Holum illuminates Pulcheria's tactical use of relics.[102] Acting under Pulcheria's influence, Theodosius sent a large donation for the poor to the archbishop of Jerusalem. Crucially, the archbishop sent relics of the right

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[97] McCulloh, 'Cult of Relics in Pope Gregory the Great', pp. 148–49.

[98] McCulloh, 'Cult of Relics in Pope Gregory the Great', p. 149.

[99] Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', p. 20.

[100] Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I*, pp. 205–07.

[101] Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*, pp. 22–23.

[102] Holum, 'Pulcheria's Crusade', pp. 163–67.

arm of St Stephen in return.[103] The receiving of relics as gifts in exchange for donations was part of the patronage and politics of conflict, so the transfer of relics can illuminate 'the intricate systems of patronage, alliance and gift-giving that linked the lay and the clerical elites of East and West in the late Roman Empire'.[104] Gregory of Tours used relics to great effect in the politically charged atmosphere of late sixth-century Tours. Gregory was an avid relic collector and imported other saints' relics (e.g. St Julian) to Tours. Brown stresses the importance of relics to bishops in this era in solidifying position and power. Bishops' personal status (*merita*) depended on their relationship with saints.[105] A major political player, Gregory negotiated with various Merovingian rulers and authored numerous lengthy works, including a catalogue of St Martin of Tours's miracles and the *History of the Franks*.[106] Common literary *topoi* of the cult of relics, such as the use of visions to 'discover' saintly remains, feature heavily in Gregory's *Liber in gloria martyrum*.[107] Paul Hayward argues that Gregory promoted the relics within his own cathedral over other manifestations of sanctity as it suited his interests to portray himself as an advocate of these saints.[108] The fifth-century inscription on the tomb of Gregory's 'hero' St Martin of Tours succinctly explains the power of saints' tombs: 'Here lies bishop Martin of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God, but who is completely present here, manifesting through virtues his every grace'.[109] This implies that, even in death, Martin was fully 'alive' and had the power to cure and intercede.

The distribution of relics in order to express bonds and friendships reflects the increasing use of relics to aid bureaucracy and diplomacy in the Catholic Church. The cult of relics, thus, became much more than a devotional expression of respect for martyrs and a belief in a supernatural intercessory power of the saint. Relics took on added official and quasi-legal importance in the administration of the expanding Church, especially in relation to the consecration of new churches. One of the Roman *ordines*, dating to the sixth century,

[103] Holum, 'Pulcheria's Crusade', p. 163.

[104] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 89–90.

[105] See Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', pp. 240–42.

[106] For Gregory's career and works, see Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. by Thorpe; James, *The Franks*; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*.

[107] For the use of visions in the works of Gregory of Tours and a comparison with Anglo-Saxon England, see Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, esp. chaps 2–3.

[108] Hayward, 'Demystifying the Role of Sanctity', p. 124.

[109] Le Blant, *Inscriptions Chrétiennes*, I, no. 178, p. 240.

gave considerable detail about the ceremony attending the consecration of the altar, describing the manner in which the relics were sealed into the structure by the bishop.[110] The ceremony shows a strong influence of the burial rite; and the altar had in a sense become a grave for the saint. This is reflected in the language as the place in the altar for the relics was called a *sepulcrum* 'grave'.[111] In Merovingian Francia, however, the Gallican rite for the consecration of a church placed less emphasis on the incorporation of relics within the altar.[112] By the eighth century relics were essential for the consecration of a church. In 787, the seventh canon of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea forbade the consecration of a church without a relic, under pain of 'being deposed'.[113] This canon also ordained the embedding of relics into existing churches. Crook has shown how the evolution of the architecture of church buildings was deeply influenced by this cult of relics.[114]

Another official use of relics was in relation to oath-swearing and binding agreements. Oaths were sworn on relics early in the growth of the cult of relics. Gregory the Great, Gregory of Tours, Augustine, and Ambrose all describe instances where the remains of the dead were used to swear oaths of purgation and fidelity.[115] In *c.* 630 Dagobert, king of the Franks, declared that the presence of relics was needed for the agreement of contracts.[116] Later, Charlemagne took this a step further and granted official legal status to the custom of taking oaths on relics. In 803 he laid down that all oaths had to be sworn in a church or on relics.[117]

As the veneration of relics became increasingly subsumed into the centralized bureaucracy of the Church, demand increased exponentially. To satisfy this need, trade in relics as commodities became big business. Relics were distributed and circulated with alarming speed once Roman law was somewhat relaxed. Enterprising merchants, such as the Roman deacon Deusdona, often used illegal methods of acquisition and circulation to satisfy the growing mar-

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[110] *Ordo* xlii, ed. by Andrieu, iv (1956), 397–402.

[111] Examined in more detail below, chap. 4.

[112] Crook, *Architectural Setting*, p. 13.

[113] Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 560.

[114] See Crook, *Architectural Setting*.

[115] Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*, pp. 235–59; Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, pp. 132–41.

[116] *Capitularia Regum Francorum Additae Sunt Marculfi Monachi*, vi, 7 (col. 60).

[117] *Capitularia Regum Francorum I*, MGH, Legum Sectio II, 41.11 (p. 118).

ket in eighth- and ninth-century Carolingian Francia.[118] There was a huge demand for relics as the Carolingians began to harness and control the political power of the cult, attempting to attain and distribute Roman relics to territories where they needed to strengthen their influence.[119] There was a clear attempt in early ninth-century Francia to regulate the power of relics and bring it under episcopal (ergo imperial) control.[120] The phenomenon of relic-theft in the Middle Ages also highlights the value of the saints as active members of society. Patrick Geary shows that the desire of communities to steal or 'kidnap' relics reflects the medieval view that saints resided with, and participated actively in the affairs of, the communities possessing their relics. Especially in later centuries, political turmoil occasioned theft or translation of relics, as there was a need for a protector against secular powers. So, they brought in an outside protector — the relics of the saint.[121]

The Irish Context

Drawing on the same parallels and responding to the same background, the cult of relics also became intrinsic to the early Irish Church. The first reliable date in Irish history offers insight into the arrival of Christianity on the island. In 431, the *Chronicle* of Prosper of Aquitaine notes that Palladius, ordained by Pope Celestine, was sent as first bishop, 'to the Irish believing in Christ'.[122] As part of what could be termed the sub-Roman world, Ireland was never politically or administratively subsumed into the empire. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence indicates that the Irish were familiar with Roman society and culture, through, amongst other things, their extensive trading network.[123] Greek and Latin literary sources also reveal contact between Ireland and the Greco-Roman world, through a two-way traffic of trade and travel.[124] Irish society was, com-

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[118] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 44–49.

[119] Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I*, pp. 216–18.

[120] Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I*, pp. 220–21.

[121] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 130.

[122] Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon*, ed. by Mommsen, *s.a.* 431 (p. 473). For the mission of Palladius, see Bieler, 'The Mission of Palladius'; Ó Cróinín, 'Who was Palladius?'.

[123] See, for example, Laing, 'The Romanization of Ireland in the Fifth Century'; O'Brien, 'Pagan or Christian?'; Kelly, 'The Discovery of Phocaean Red Slip Ware in Ireland'.

[124] For a comprehensive survey of these sources, see Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World*. See also Parsons and Sims-Williams, *Ptolemy*.

paratively, politically fragmented and characterized by a plurality of territorial kingdoms and leaders.[125] However, while political power may have been diffused amongst various dynasties in early Ireland, external Roman evidence indicates that this power was not necessarily weak or diluted. The Roman military historian Ammianus Marcellinus records that incursions by the *Scotti* and the *Picti* caused a serious threat to peace and stability in Roman Britain. Marcellinus claims that these peoples 'broke their understanding to keep peace' and 'laid waste the country near the frontier, and caused alarm among the provincials, who were exhausted by the repeated disasters they had already suffered'.[126] In response, Caesar sent the 'master of cavalry' Lupicinus to 'settle the troubles either by negotiation or by force'.[127] The reference to a prior truce and the suggestion that Lupicinus could negotiate with these 'tribes' implies an incursionary force of considerable power, organization, and leadership, and also perhaps advanced naval capabilities.[128] Patrick's two works, the *Confessio* and *Epistola*, provide us with rare fifth-century internal documentary sources. Examined together with other contemporary evidence such as linguistic borrowings, place names, and ogham stones, Patrick's account of being kidnapped from Britain, and enslaved in Ireland, illustrates the contact between the Irish and Roman Britain.[129]

Though most of our evidence for early Ireland dates from the seventh century onwards we can safely assume that the Church grew steadily in the fifth and sixth centuries, given its relatively sophisticated nature by the seventh century. In particular, the convening of synods and the deliberations on the Easter controversy reveal this maturity.[130] As early as the fifth century the writings of Patrick imply that the Irish Church was partly established by his time.[131] He insisted in his *Confessio* that he was the first to take Christianity to a part of Ireland where no one had penetrated before, 'to remote parts, where no one lived any further'.[132] In this instance he was most likely referring to the western

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[125] See Byrne, 'Tribes and Tribalism'; MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, esp. chap. 1.

[126] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, trans. by Hamilton, xx, 1 (p. 185).

[127] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, trans. by Hamilton, xx, 1 (p. 185).

[128] For discussion (and also for some previously overlooked references to *Scotti* in Greek literature) see Rance, 'Epiphanius of Salamis and the Scotti', pp. 229–34.

[129] See *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii*, ed. by Bieler.

[130] As evidenced, for example, by Cummian's paschal letter, *c.* 632, Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, p. 20.

[131] For a general introduction to the writings of Patrick, see O'Loughlin, *Saint Patrick*.

[132] Patrick, *Confessio*, ed. by Bieler, 51 (p. 86).

coast of Ireland, which may not have been touched by the Palladian mission.[133] Furthermore, the terminology used by Patrick to describe his mission indicates a certain level of sophistication and organization, as he refers to his 'superiors' and his 'ministry of service'.[134] He also stresses the success of his conversion activities, claiming that he cannot 'count the number of sons of Irish and daughters of kings who are now monks and virgins of Christ'.[135] The circulation of Victorius's Easter tables shows close interaction between Rome, Gaul, and Ireland in the sixth century, as these tables were received in Bangor before Columbanus left *c.* 591.[136] Indeed, there were extensive contacts between Ireland and Aquitaine in the sixth century, as attested, for example, by the circulation of the poems and hymns of Venantius Fortunatus.[137]

In Late Antiquity, in keeping with a pattern of maintaining continuity with the deteriorating political empire, the Roman Church had established an administrative system that imitated imperial patterns.[138] It was urban and episcopal in character and it created an ecclesiastical government along imperial lines. Bishops were in charge of dioceses roughly equal to the secular administrative provinces and bishops forged close relationships with Roman administrators. They also frequently collaborated in the enforcement of imperial decrees. In fact, part of Christianity's success in the Roman Empire lay in its ability to accommodate itself to long-standing classical traditions.[139] This awareness of the pagan past is evident in the churches built along classical lines by popes in the fifth century, with the cooperation of the now Christian aristocratic elite. Likewise, the Church in Ireland became successful due to its ability to adapt to pre-Christian society. There is a scarcity of evidence for the early organization of the Irish Church. It is not until the seventh century that the sources begin to illuminate the ecclesiastical system in significant detail. Presumably, Palladius and the Roman mission in the mid-fifth century intended to establish a Church along Roman episcopal lines. Indeed, Palladius was sent as 'first bishop to the

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[133] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 214–16.

[134] Patrick, *Confessio*, ed. by Bieler, 37, 49 (pp. 77, 85).

[135] Patrick, *Epistola*, ed. by Bieler, 12 (p. 97); see also *Confessio*, ed. by Bieler, 41 (p. 81).

[136] *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. by Walker, pp. x–xi.

[137] See *Aquitaine and Ireland*, ed. by Picard, in particular Stevenson, 'Irish Hymns, Venantius Fortunatus and Poitiers'. Fortunatus's processional hymn *Vexilla regis* is discussed below, chap. 6.

[138] See Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*; Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*.

[139] See Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World*; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*.

Irish', and Patrick also referred to himself in such terms.[140] Ultimately, the fact
that he was established as a bishop in Ireland confirms that by the end of the
fifth century a Church along Roman episcopal lines was being developed. It
soon became obvious, however, that due to the absence of a direct Roman
heritage in Ireland, as well as the lack of significant urban centres, a wholesale
introduction of the Roman ecclesiastical model was unsuitable for the coun-
try. Instead, a 'mixed' monastic and episcopal system flourished in which the
most important churches were monasteries united to lesser daughter houses
in a *paruchia* under the overall control of the head of the mother church.[141]
However, there is no scholarly consensus here.[142] While Kathleen Hughes'
interpretation of a major change in the sixth and seventh centuries from an
episcopal model to a predominantly monastic church still holds weight,[143]
Colmán Etchingham presents a convincing argument for considerable conti-
nuity.[144] His analysis elucidates a complex organizational system in which the
major Irish churches employed three models of authority (episcopal, abbatial,
and 'coarbial') to varying degrees.

    Despite this progress, vestiges of pre-Christian practices still remained.
Compromise was an inevitable facet of the Church's success in adapting to Irish
society. Our knowledge of pre-Christian Irish society and religion is sparse.
Patrick's *Confessio* sheds some light on the pagan religion that he encountered
in the fifth century. He claimed that the Irish 'never had knowledge of God
but until now always worshipped idols and things impure',[145] and criticized sun
worship, proclaiming that believers in Christ adore him who is 'the true sun'.[146]
A century later, Ireland was still not fully Christianized and this prompted the
Church to instruct its members on dealings with the pagans. This is reflected
in *First Synod of Saint Patrick*,[147] a canonical text dated to approximately two

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[140] Patrick, *Epistola*, ed. by Bieler, 1 (p. 91).

[141] See Ó Corráin, 'The Early Irish Church'; Sharpe, 'Churches and Communities'; Etching-
ham, *Church Organisation*.

[142] Etchingham, 'The Implications of *Paruchia*', provides a good summary.

[143] See Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*.

[144] See Etchingham, *Church Organisation*.

[145] Patrick, *Confessio*, ed. by Bieler, 41 (p. 81).

[146] Patrick, *Confessio*, ed. by Bieler, 60 (p. 90).

[147] Bieler, *Penitentials*, pp. 54–59. For discussion, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*,
p. 40; *The Bishops' Synod*, ed. by Faris.

centuries after the saint's floruit,[148] which prohibits Christians from the pagan practice of swearing oaths before a druid.[149] Likewise, a cleric cannot accept alms from a pagan or act as enforcing surety for him.[150]

Part of the Church's early progress in Ireland was due to an assimilation of pagan holy places. Instead of destroying these places of worship and inviting animosity, early Irish Christians appropriated them for the Church. A good example of the process is provided by the Patrician narrative of the transformation of a pagan well into a Christian holy place.[151] This conversion technique was used in many missionary enterprises and even had papal sanction, as shown by Gregory the Great's advice to Augustine of Canterbury, as contained in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.[152] The success of the new religion was strengthened by the use of locations already imbued with importance by the natives.[153] The proximity of some pagan sites to Christian centres suggests the possibility that land used for pagan sanctuaries was conceded to the Church. For example, Brigit's churches of Kildare and Kilcullen, the church of Iserninus, were both near the pagan sanctuary of Knockaulin. The church of Armagh, named after the pagan goddess Macha, may also have benefited from its association with the ancient royal centre of the *Ulaid*, *Emain Macha*.[154] The Church, thus, set about reshaping the landscape in a Christian way but with continuity from the pagan past.[155]

[148] For dating by modern scholars, see Breen, 'Date, Provenance and Authorship', pp. 84, 96; Dumville, *Councils and Synods*, p. 22. Flechner, 'An Insular Tradition of Ecclesiastical Law', pp. 27–28 provides an overview of the debate over dating. Previously, scholars had argued that the text was composed in the fifth or sixth centuries. For example, Bieler ('Interpretationes Patricianae', p. 9) proposed a fifth-century date and Binchy ('St. Patrick's First Synod', p. 49) revised an earlier article which argued for a seventh-century date and instead accepted Hughes' argument (*Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 44–49) that the text was written in the second half of the sixth century.

[149] *Synodus I S. Patricii*, ed. by Bieler, 14 (p. 56).

[150] *Synodus I S. Patricii*, ed. by Bieler, 8, 13 (pp. 54, 56).

[151] Tírechán, 39 (pp. 152–54).

[152] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, I, 30 (pp. 106–08). See also I, 27 (pp. 78–102) which deals with many conversion issues.

[153] On the background of Gregory's theories on the Christianization of shrines in Anglo-Saxon England, see Markus, 'Gregory the Great's Europe'.

[154] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 147, points out that this theory takes for granted that *Emain Macha* remained an important site until the fifth century, which is not necessarily true. See also Mallory and McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster*.

[155] For discussion of the interface between 'pagan' and Christian Ireland, see, for example, McCone, *Pagan Past*; Bhreathnach, 'Temoria: Caput Scotorum?'; Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun*.

Nevertheless, while the Church was firmly established by the seventh century, pre-Christian elements remained for centuries and many concessions were made, to the extent that some of the challenges provided by Irish practice were tacitly ignored. Irish law consistently protected the reproductive rights of men, even to the extent of allowing polygyny.[156] The Old Irish Heptads also deviated from church norms by providing grounds for divorce.[157] Despite Christian beliefs these practices remained in Irish society for centuries, to the dismay of twelfth-century church reformers.[158] There can be little doubt that they provided a challenge to any theologically literate Christian. The Church owned a great deal of land and wealth and maintained many of the power structures within society.[159] Members of the ruling clans or aristocracy often filled important church positions, maintaining the status quo in terms of hierarchy.[160] The Church enjoyed the special protection of the law and the patronage of the rich and powerful. Yet, this was not a comfortable situation for all Irish Christians. A *peregrinus* such as Columbanus chose renunciation and exile, perhaps recognizing that the heavenly kingdom could not be found among the realities of Irish society.[161] By the twelfth century, writers such as Giraldus Cambrensis bemoaned the state of the Irish Church and what was viewed as its deviation from the Roman ideal and from continental practice. However, an examination of the sources for relic veneration reveals that, in the earliest period, Irish clerics were attempting to adhere to church norms.

[156] *CIH*, vi, 2301.35–38; *Bretha Crólige*, ed. and trans. by Binchy, 57 (pp. 44–45).

[157] *CIH*, i, 47, v, 1823–24, 1848, 1883–84.

[158] Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, chap. 5; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland', esp. pp. 16–17.

[159] See Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, for a modern re-evaluation of the interactions between the secular and clerical power structures in Ireland, especially in relation to 'elite communities of learning'.

[160] See Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', for a particularly detailed example.

[161] Charles-Edwards 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', shows the role of *peregrinatio* in Irish society. See also Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom'.

Origins and Early Cult in Ireland

Central to any appreciation of the cult of relics is an understanding of its inherent hierarchy. This structure was both sacrosanct and changeable. Fluidity was a necessary feature of the evolution of the cult, for while clearly defined theories and structures are trademarks of any stable and influential institution, adaptability is also imperative. As we have seen, the adaptable nature of the early Church was one of its key strengths. Within the hierarchy of relics, the tomb and body of the saint is at the apex. With this knowledge at the forefront, the next couple of chapters investigate the role of corporeal relics in the early Irish Church.

The final resting place of a saint was the primary locus of his power. Consequently, this was the most important site in the cult of relics of the saint. Pilgrimage to these sites became a lasting cornerstone of popular devotion in the Church and, indeed, is an important feature of devotional activity in general, religious or otherwise.[1] This is reflected in the comprehensive analyses of pilgrimage provided by other scholars for Ireland and elsewhere, and need not be revisited here.[2] In order to circumvent the logistical issues arising from the desire to venerate the body of the saint, contact relics were created and circulated around the Christian world. In this way, the *potentia* of the saint could be accessed at a distance from the location of the actual body of the

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[1] See Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present*.

[2] See, for example, Elsner and Rutherford, *Pilgrimage in Antiquity*; Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*; Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*. For Ireland, see, for example, O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*; Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*; Herity, 'The Antiquity of *an Turas*'; Hughes, 'The Changing Theory of Irish Pilgrimage'.

saint. Similarly, in some rare cases, the body of the saint was dismembered and fragmented in order that more than one location could possess the corporeal remains of the saint. Indeed, in some cases the whole body of the saint could be taken on tour to provide intimate access to Christians in remote regions. Nevertheless, there was no substitute for the actual tomb of the saint, the *locus* of his ultimate resurrection into heaven. This is an important theme in the hagiography of early Irish saints, therefore, and is particularly well expressed in the writings of Adomnán.[3] The importance of the tomb of the saint also led to the proliferation of local saints, as few could travel to the Mediterranean to visit the tombs of the early martyrs and church founders. In the growth and evolution of the cult of relics from the fourth to eighth centuries, saints became ever more bound to place.[4] As the actual body of the saint, or parts thereof, were initially judged to be the only relics containing the power of the saint, we cannot exaggerate the importance of corporeal relics. The early opposition to the idea of secondary relics indicates that, to some, only the bodily remains of the saints were imbued with their holiness. This conflict is also evident in medieval Ireland. The earliest sources place emphasis on corporeal and martyrial relics. By the eighth and ninth centuries associative relics were more common and, consequently, we can see an increasing focus on items such as bells and books in the Irish sources.

Origins of the Cult of Relics in Ireland

Rome, laden with the remains of martyrs in the catacombs and those created in the Colosseum, was at the centre of the Christian cult of relics. Indeed, the cult of relics was a crucial component in the consolidation of the papacy and of Rome as the administrative and spiritual home of the Western Church. Despite the popularity of local Irish saints and confessors, the relics of the martyrs and apostles still headed the hierarchy of relics in the Irish Church, as elsewhere. It was its relics that constantly ensured Rome's superiority over all other cities and sites of relic cults. The Church promoted this by building grand shrines to the early martyrs in Rome and by weaving bonds across the Christian world via such relics as the cloths of *brandea*. These created intangible, but nevertheless concrete, ties of allegiance and

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[3] O'Loughlin, 'The Tombs of the Saints', esp. p. 7; Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies', pp. 251–53.

[4] For a succinct overview, see Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', esp. pp. 40–43.

adherence.[5] The possessors of these relics in Ireland in turn used them to create internal bonds. An acknowledgment of the pre-eminence of Rome is present in the earliest internal evidence for the Irish Church — the fifth-century voice of Patrick. He refers to Christians as 'ciuibus sanctorum Romanorum' (fellow-citizens of the saints of Rome) in his lambast against the heretical activities of Coroticus and his acolytes.[6] The clear reverence and respect in the early Irish Church towards the Holy See is reflected in the wording of the *Letters* of Columbanus, at the beginning of the seventh century. He clearly expresses the Irish Church's acknowledgment of the primacy of Rome, stating that the Irish 'are disciples of Sts Peter and Paul', and 'bound to the see' (*cathedra*) of Peter.[7] Columbanus honours the pope with effusive and humble greetings, referring to him as 'Romanae pulcherrimo Ecclesiae Decori, totius Europae flaccentis augustissimo quasi cuidam Flori' (the fairest Ornament of the Roman Church, the Flower, as it were, esteemed beyond all others in Europe in her decay).[8] Evidently, then, at the dawn of the seventh century, Ireland's attitude to Rome was in line with that of contemporary continental churches. The writings of Columbanus also demonstrate the exalted position of relics in the Irish Church. His first letter, written *c*. 600 to Gregory the Great, is particularly significant as this pope was key in the evolution of the cult of relics. In this letter, Columbanus laments the fact that he is unable to visit the relics of the apostles in Rome.[9] In another letter, composed a few years later to an unnamed pope, he again respects the power of the relics of the saints in Rome: 'Vale, dulcissime in Christo Papa, memor nostri et in sanctis orationibus iusta sanctorum cineres' (Farewell, Pope most dear in Christ, remember us in your holy prayers, beside the ashes of the saints).[10] Furthermore, the Irish monk clearly states, in an almost warning tone, to Pope Boniface IV in 613, that Rome's power lay in its possession of these relics: 'si dici potest, propter Christi geminos apostolos [...] vos prope caelestes estis, et Roma orbis terrarum caput est ecclesiarum' (if it may be said that because of Christ's twin apostles you are raised to heights that are almost celestial and Rome is the head of all the churches).[11]

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[5] In relation to Ireland, see Ryan, 'The Early Irish Church'; Sheehy, 'Relics of the Apostles'; Sharpe, 'Armagh and Rome in the Seventh Century'.

[6] Patrick, *Epistola*, ed. by Bieler, 2 (p. 92).

[7] Columbanus, *Epistula*, v, ed. by Walker, 3, 11 (pp. 38, 48).

[8] Columbanus, *Epistula*, i, ed. by Walker, 1 (p. 2).

[9] Columbanus, *Epistula*, i, ed. by Walker, 8 (p. 10).

[10] Columbanus, *Epistula*, iii, ed. by Walker, 3 (p. 24).

[11] Columbanus, *Epistula*, v, ed. by Walker, 11 (p. 48).

Rome's dominance of the cult of relics was fully in force by the sixth century with Gregory the Great's papal programme of distributing Roman contact relics. These relics represented papal authority and approval, and formed a framework of alliances emanating from Rome. The pre-seventh century Church in Ireland is obscured by a lack of sources. Nevertheless, Finnian's (Uinniauus) reference to the *basilicae sanctorum* in Ireland in the sixth century prompted Sharpe's analysis of the linguistic and onomastic evidence for the earliest Irish saints' cults.[12] The *Penitential of Finnian* instructs clerics that 'basilicis sanctorum ministrandum est' (they are obliged to serve the churches of the saints).[13] Finnian's *Penitential* influenced that of Columbanus and was therefore written at least as early as the late sixth century.[14] In Late Antiquity the term *basilica* referred to churches containing relics of the martyrs or saints.[15] Sharpe argues that the vernacular usage of *basilica* in Welsh and Irish may indicate a very early period for its employment. Accordingly, Finnian's *basilicae sanctorum* may have been some of the earliest churches in Ireland that would have housed either contact relics distributed from Rome or perhaps the remains of Ireland's early missionaries.[16]

This can be teased out further via an analysis of some of the seventh-century texts. These sources stress the importance of Roman relics and of communion with the Holy See, as this is clearly where the power lay at this time. The first Roman relics in Ireland could conceivably have been brought by Palladius to validate his mission in the fifth century.[17] This hypothesis is supported by a reference in Prosper's account of Celestine's endeavours against the Pelagian controversy in Britain.[18] Prosper implies that Celestine sent the bishop to Ireland in order to strengthen his efforts against the Pelagian heresy in the neighbouring island.[19] If relics accompanied this mission they would have signified contact with Rome — their possession symbolized union with the Apostolic See.[20] In their own versions of this event, later Patrician hagiographers pro-

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[12] Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', pp. 136–37.

[13] *Penitential of Finnian*, ed. and trans. by Bieler, 33 (pp. 86–87).

[14] Meens, 'The Penitential of Finnian', p. 245.

[15] See Appendix.

[16] See Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', pp. 137–50.

[17] Doherty, 'Use of Relics', pp. 91–92.

[18] Prosper, *Contra Collatorem*, ed. by Migne, col. 271.

[19] Prosper, *Contra Collatorem*, ed. by Migne, col. 271.

[20] Sheehy, 'Relics of the Apostles', p. 373.

moted the theory that Palladius endowed the Irish Church with Roman relics. The early ninth-century *Vita Secunda* of Patrick claims that a box containing the relics of Peter, Paul, and other saints was left in Cell Fine.[21] It would have been standard practice to consolidate a Roman mission with relics. There is an exact analogy in the actions of Gregory the Great who sent Augustine to Anglo-Saxon England with martyrial relics.[22] However, the earliest definitive evidence for Roman relics in Ireland comes from Cummian's letter on the paschal controversy, written *c.* 632. Cummian, possibly a bishop or *fer légind* of Clonfert on the Shannon,[23] shows how the Irish deferred to Rome when they disagreed, and this is later echoed in the *Liber Angeli*.[24] Cummian defends at length the superiority of Rome and contends that the relics of the holy martyrs brought back from Rome authenticated the decision regarding the correct dating of Easter.[25] In case of any doubters Cummian verified his argument by actually testing the efficacy of the relics, and of course they duly produced miracles: 'Uidimus oculis nostris puellam caecam omnino ad has reliquias oculos aperientem, et paraliticum ambulantem, et multa demonia eiecta' (We saw with our own eyes a totally blind girl opening her eyes at these relics, and a paralytic walking and many demons cast out).[26] The earliest Irish hagiographical texts also highlight the superiority of Rome and its relics. For example, the anonymous *Vita Prima* of Brigit contains an episode where the saint sent experts to Rome to bring back the Roman Masses: 'In urbe Romana juxta Petri et Pauli corpora audivi Missas, et nimis desidero, ut me istius ordo et universa regula deferatur a Roma' (In the city of Rome, next to the bodies of Peter and Paul, I heard the Masses, and greatly I desire that the order of this and the universal rule be brought to me from Rome).[27]

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[21] *Vita Secunda*, ed. by Bieler, 24 (p. 76). For the location of 'Cell Fine' see the discussion in Byrne and Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick', p. 88, which identifies Killeen Cormac (Co. Kildare) and Kilpoole (Co. Wicklow) as possible sites.

[22] See Meens, 'Background to Augustine's Mission'.

[23] Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 220–21.

[24] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, ll. 277–80 (p. 92); *LA*, 29 (pp. 188–90). See also *Hibernensis*, 20.5 (p. 61).

[25] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, ll. 285–86 (p. 94).

[26] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, ll. 286–88 (pp. 94–95).

[27] *Vita Prima*, 89 (p. 131). There is a long and protracted debate concerning the dating of this text to the seventh or eighth centuries and its relationship with Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae* (*VCog*) *c.* 675 (see n. 51 below). The name *Vita Prima* preserves the Bollandists' belief that this was the first surviving life of Brigit and that *VCog* was composed after. Scholars such as

Tírechán's *Collectanea* reveals the extent to which the cult of relics had taken hold in Ireland by the late seventh century.[28] His account of the travels of Patrick is a veritable goldmine of evidence for the veneration of bodily remains. His numerous references to the location of the bones of holy men suggest that the Irish countryside was beginning to be defined by the cult of relics at this time.[29] For example, Tírechán claims that Patrick gave his disciple Sachellus 'a portion of the relics of Peter and Paul, Stephen, and Lawrence, which are in Armagh' (Et portauit ab illo partem de reliquís Petri et Pauli, Laurentii et Stefani quae sunt in Machi).[30] In reality, these Armagh relics may have been the Roman relics mentioned in Cummian's paschal letter and thus not received until the 630s. Regardless, Armagh was clearly using these relics to strengthen its political position in the late seventh century. It is mentioned elsewhere in the text that Sachellus was bishop of Baislec, a name still preserved in Baslick, Co. Roscommon.[31] In this way the name of his foundation preserves the tradition of his association with relics, as the term *basilica* implies that it was an early foundation containing relics.[32] Doherty argues that the use of the term *basilica*, like *dominicum*, is a feature of the earliest days of the Church in Ireland and, consequently, that one can argue that Tírechán's *Bassilica Sanctorum* was a genuine fifth-century church.[33] Earlier in the same text Tírechán refers to a place 'in quo est Bassilica sanctorum' (where there is the Basilica of the saints), which was probably the same place.[34] Sharpe shows that this episode

Esposito, 'On the Early Lives', Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', and Howlett, '*Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*', uphold this ordering of the texts, and indeed argue that Cogitosus used *Vita Prima* as one of his sources. However, arguments posited by Ó Briain, 'Brigitana', McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', Connolly 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', and Bitel, 'Ekphrasis at Kildare', to name a few, give priority to Cogitosus.

[28] For the difficulty in providing a precise date for the *Collectanea*, see Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 41–43. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 439, dates the text to *c.* 690 on historical evidence.

[29] See, for example, Tírechán, 14.6 (p. 134), Tírechán, 22.4 (p. 140).

[30] Tírechán, II, 3.5 (p. 122).

[31] Tírechán, 32.5 (p. 148); Shanahan, 'Baslick, Co. Roscommon'. See also Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 138, for Basaleg, in Glamorgan.

[32] See Appendix.

[33] Doherty, 'Basilica', pp. 309–10. Doherty details the early references to the term *basilica* in Ireland and provides an account of the etymology of the term and the role the basilica played in the evolution of the early Irish Church.

[34] Tírechán, 29.2 (p. 146).

in Tírechán is most likely an attempt by Armagh to subsume these early foundations sanctified by relics, which we know from Finnian clearly existed.[35] In Tírechán's version of events, Patrick is the only relevant early missionary in Ireland, and he is quite critical of Sachellus and another bishop, Cethiachus, for ordaining 'episcopos, praespiteros, diaconos, clericos' (bishops, priests, deacons, and clerics) in Mag Aí without Patrick's consent.[36] Even though the men went to Armagh and sought forgiveness from Patrick, he still condemned their churches, proclaiming 'Non magnae erunt aeclessiae uestrae' (Your churches shall not be great).[37] The warning here is clear; churches should be careful and submit to Armagh or risk incurring the wrath of Patrick. As will be discussed in more detail below, one of Armagh's favoured methods of attaining power and control over the Irish Church in the seventh century was to claim jurisdiction over all churches founded by Patrick.

The Latin name Sachellus would also support the theory that he belonged to an early phase of the Irish Church. Other individuals with Latin names such as Assicus and Mucneus may also belong to this period. The corporeal relic cults of these individuals are an important element in Tírechán's narrative. He claims the bones of Assicus are buried in Mag Sereth in Ráth Cungi: 'sunt ossa eius in campo Sered hir Raith Chungi'.[38] Furthermore, he is concerned that the communities of Ardstraw and Columba tried to claim him, though he was a monk of Patrick's.[39] Similarly, Patrick is given credit for founding the great church in the Wood of Fochloth, which enshrines the relics of Mucneus: 'Mucneus frater Cethiachi episcopi, cuius sunt reliquiae in aeclessia magna Patricii in silua Fochlithi' (Mucneus, brother of Bishop Cethiachus, whose relics are in Patrick's great church in the Wood of Fochloth).[40] Later, Tírechán reiterates this statement and clarifies that it is the holy bones that are contained within this church: 'Et fundauit aeclessiam super siluam Fochluth, in qua sunt ossa sancta Mucnoi episcopi' (And he founded a church in the Wood of Fochloth, in which there are the holy bones of Bishop Mucnoe).[41] The evidence of Tírechán substantiates the linguistic and onomastic evidence that there were earlier

[35] Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', pp. 138, 151.

[36] Tírechán, II, 3.6 (pp. 122–23).

[37] Tírechán, II, 3.6 (pp. 124–25).

[38] Tírechán, 22.4 (p. 140).

[39] Tírechán, 22.4 (p. 140).

[40] Tírechán, 14.6 (p. 134).

[41] Tírechán, 42.7 (pp. 156–57).

churches and cults, believed to be contemporaneous with Patrick's mission, since he is concerned with claiming these ancient foundations for Armagh. Indeed, Armagh's interest in these churches acknowledges their respected and superior — or at least ancient — status within the Irish Church.

Tírechán also presents Patrick as being aware of the power of his own relics within his lifetime. For example, when one of his teeth fell out Patrick bestowed it on his beloved disciple Brón as a relic.[42] The choice of Brón was significant as he was one of Patrick's key men in Connacht. His church's prosperity and success would have been bolstered through the possession of this valuable relic. He also gave his name to the church and townland of Killaspugbrone (Church of Bishop Brón) in Co. Sligo. The hagiography of Brigit displays a similar awareness of the potency of her corporeal relics while she was still living. For example, both *Vita Prima* and the ninth-century *Bethu Brigte* describe an incident where Brigit, falling from her chariot while crossing a river, gashes her head against a stone.[43] Subsequently, her blood miraculously cured two mute women. *Bethu Brigte* emphasizes the enduring potency of the bloodied stone: 'Et lapis ille memorabilis sepe sanat plures. Na(ch) cend co cend-galar suidigthir do is [s]lan du-[n] (d)-intai huath' (And that memorable stone often heals many. Any head with a disease of the head which is placed on it returns from it cured).[44] The *Vita* of St Cainnech, potentially composed as early as the eighth century, underlines the role of corporeal remains in connecting saint with place.[45] In this *Vita* the saint goes on pilgrimage to Rome, converts an Italian king, and promises to be buried (and resurrected) in Italy. However, an angel of God had to intervene in order to bring Cainnech back to Ireland, as that was the predestined place of his resurrection. Nevertheless, Cainnech does leave a piece of himself in Italy (with the assistance of a dragon!):

> Sed angelus Dei, sanctum frequenter visitans, illum increpavit propter incautam promisionem, qui resurrectionem in Hibernia predixit. Sanctus ergo Kannechus in dubitione anxiatus erat inter suam promisionem et verbum angeli, sed Dominus verus index adiuvavit illum. Nam draco igneus de celo descendit et extremum

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[42] Tírechán, 45.4 (p. 158).

[43] *Vita Prima*, 29 (p. 122); *Bethu Brigte*, ed. by Ó hAodha, 29 (p. 10).

[44] *Bethu Brigte*, ed. and trans. by Ó hAodha, 29 (pp. 10, 27). Cf. *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 1683–85 (p. 89).

[45] *Vita S. Cainnechi*, ed. by Heist, *VSH*, pp. 182–98. For dating, see Sharpe, *Medieval Saint's Lives*, p. 334; Herbert, 'The *Vita Columbae*', p. 39. For arguments supporting a much later date, see Carey's review of Sharpe in *Speculum*, 68; Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 138.

digitum pedis dextri sancti Kannichi circumcidit. Sanctus autem vir Kannechus, suam promisionem implens, digitum suum ibi reliquit et, verbo angeli obediens, ad Hyberniam reversus est.[46]

But the angel of God, having frequently visited the saint, complained about the incautious promise, having predicted his resurrection in Ireland. Then Saint Cainnech was in distress in doubts between his own promise and the word of the angel, but the Lord, the True Judge, helped him. For a fiery dragon came down from heaven, and cut off the end toe of the right foot of Cainnech. So, the holy man Cainnech, fulfilling his promise, left his toe there and, in obedience to the word of the angel, he returned to Ireland.

This concept is echoed in the eighth-century collection of Irish church canons, the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, which states that the head of a saint will determine his place of resurrection, even if his ashes reside elsewhere.[47] Indeed, the hagiographical texts portray an Irish landscape that is being gradually Christianized through the physical traces left by the saints. Muirchú claims that Patrick stopped and prayed at every cross he met as he journeyed through the countryside, implying that, thereafter, every cross marked a place imbued with Patrick's presence and power or virtue.[48] Crosses were also used to indicate specific sites where the saint had stood. According to Muirchú a cross on Slíabh Mis marked the spot where Patrick first viewed that district and Tírechán mentions a cross located in a site associated with Patrick and his disciple Secundinus.[49] Stones were also tangible markers in the landscape. Of particular interest is Muirchú's account of the footprint of an angel fossilized onto a rock on Slíabh Mis — imprinted after the angel spoke to Patrick, but still visible in the present day.[50]

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[46] *Vita S. Cainnechi*, ed. by Heist, 9 (p. 184).

[47] *Hibernensis*, 49.10 (pp. 206–07). This attitude is also found in the *Life of Fintan of Clonenagh*, where it is claimed that Fintan buried the heads of some murdered people in his monks' cemetery in the hope that they would benefit from the prayers of monks and be resurrected in the place where the principal part of their bodies rested. *Vita S. Fintani*, ed. by Heist, 15 (pp. 149–50).

[48] Muirchú, ɪɪ, 1 (p. 114).

[49] Muirchú, ɪ, 12.2 (p. 80); Tírechán, 34.1 (p. 150).

[50] Muirchú, ɪɪ, 15.3 (p. 82). Compare the veneration of sacred footprints and rocks in the Jewish cult of Elijah (Islamic al-Khadir). See Meri, 'Re-appropriating Sacred Space'.

Tomb Cults: Elevation and Enshrinement

The portrayal of Brigit's tomb (and the associated pilgrims) at Kildare, provided by Cogitosus in his *Vita Brigitae*, composed *c.* 675, is the most explicit literary example of a translation and accompanying enshrinement and elevation in early Christian Ireland.[51] The significance of this episode, and the parallels with relic veneration elsewhere, has been well established by other scholars.[52] However, it is worth reiterating briefly here in order to tease out the details more carefully. In this text Cogitosus provides a detailed description of the enshrinement and elevation of a saint within the Irish Church. More importantly, he provides the earliest literary reference to the elevation of a saint's remains in an Irish context. Cogitosus describes the tombs of Brigit and her bishop Conláed, while relating the story of a miracle that took place during renovation of the church:

> In qua gloriosa amborum, hoc est, Archiepiscopi Conlei et hujus Virginis florentissimae Brigidae corpora, a dextris et a sinistris altaris decorati, in monumentis posita, ornatis vario cultu auri et argenti et gemmarum pretiosi lapidis [...] requiescunt.

> In which the glorious bodies of both —namely Archbishop Conleth and our most flourishing virgin Brigit — are laid on the right and left of the ornate altar and rest in tombs adorned with a refined profusion of gold, silver, gems and precious stones.[53]

The grandeur of the tombs, their prime positions on either side of the altar, and the sumptuousness of the adornments, leave us in no doubt that the ven-

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[51] Despite some disagreement among scholars regarding a precise dating, *VCog* can be confidently ascribed to the second half of the seventh century. The most important piece of external evidence in dating *VCog* is the reference to Cogitosus by Muirchú. *VCog*, therefore, was written before the *Vita Patricii* was written *c.* 661–700 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 1–2). Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 438, argues that the use of the title 'archbishop' by Cogitosus indicates that he was writing *c.* 675. Sharpe, '*Vitae S. Brigitae*', believes *VCog* was written between Muirchú (ante 700) and Tírechán (post 665). For some, the range of most likely dates depends primarily on the relationship of *VCog* to *Vita Prima* and of Cogitosus to Muirchú. For instance, Howlett, '*Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*', asserts the primacy of *Vita Prima* and also claims that Ailerán (d. 665) wrote the text. This necessarily restricts the possible dates for the composition of *VCog*. Internal factors such as the Irish words preserved in the text also suggest a date before the year 700. Words in *VCog* such as *Duptoch*, *Gabor*, and *Ectech* were written before the weakening of ŏ to ă between consonants, and of ĕ to ă between non-palatal consonants in unaccented syllables in the early eighth century — Ó Briain, 'Brigitana', p. 125.

[52] See, for example, Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, chap. 5; Bradley, 'Archaeology, Topography and Building Fabric', pp. 27–31; Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints*, chap. 6.

[53] *VCog*, 37 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.1 (p. 25).

eration of the corporeal remains of Brigit and Bishop Conláed was crucial to the church of Kildare. This is explicitly stated by Cogitosus, who marvelled at the large crowds drawn into Kildare by the tombs of its patrons: 'et quis dinumerare posit diversas turbas et innumerabiles populos de omnibus provinciis Hiberniae confluentes?' (And who can count the different crowds and numberless peoples flocking from all the provinces?).[54] The presence of the corporeal remains of the founder drew many pilgrims and much revenue into the church, which was vitally important for the monastery's political position.

Cogitosus chose his words carefully and his use of the phrase 'basilica maxima' to describe Kildare was justified on account of the bodies of Brigit and Conláed contained within.[55] The building is, therefore, elevated in status to a basilica. We can safely assume that the selection of this word to describe the church was deliberate, because, following Isidore, the Irish interpreted it with the meaning 'royal'.[56] Indeed, Cogitosus's portrayal of the architecture of the building echoes the layout of some continental basilicas.[57] He describes a church in which 'a large congregation of people of varying status, rank, sex and local origin' was divided by 'partitions placed between them' (populus grandis in ordine et gradibus et sexu et locis diversis, interjectis inter se parietibus).[58] However, this diverse congregration prayed to the 'omnipotent Master' as equals, as Cogitosus proudly proclaims that the faithful were 'diverso ordine et uno animo omnipotentem orant Dominatorem' (differing in status, but one in spirit).[59] The double or partitioned church layout dates back to the earliest Christian architecture. A variation of this design is apparent in the pre-Constantinian church oratory of Aquileia — the earliest known building constructed by Christians for their assembly.[60] The symmetry and equilibrium of the layout of the church are perfectly executed, punctuated with dividing walls and many windows, identical doors on either side, and equally partitioned sections for the different ranks of the faithful, with women on the left side of

[54] *VCog*, 39 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.10 (p. 27).

[55] *VCog*, 37 (p. 141).

[56] See Appendix.

[57] See Doherty, 'Basilica', p. 313; Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, chap. 5, esp. p. 145; Neuman de Vegvar, 'Romanitas and Realpolitik', pp. 162–65.

[58] *VCog*, 37 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.3 (p. 26).

[59] *VCog*, 37 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.3 (p. 26).

[60] Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, pp. 137–40; Bradley, 'Archaeology, Topography and Building Fabric', p. 29 n. 14, p. 44.

the church and men on the right.[61] The comparison with Gregory of Tours's description of St Martin's basilica in Tours is noteworthy. Gregory recounts that the new bishop, Perpetuus, judged the old chapel (*cellulam*) of St Martin as too small and unworthy for the countless miracles being performed at the saint's tomb. So, he decided to move it away and build there a great basilica according to the following dimensions:

> Qua submota, magnam ibi basilicam, quae usque hodie permanet, fabricavit, quae habetur a civitate passus 550. Habet in longo pedes 160, in lato 60, habet in alto usque ad cameram pedes 45; fenestras in altario 32, in capso 20; columnas 41; in toto aedificio fenestras 52, columnas 120; ostia 8, tria in altario, quinque in capso.[62]

> Moving it away he built there a great basilica, which remains to the present day, situated five hundred and fifty paces from the city. It is one hundred and sixty feet long and sixty wide and forty-five feet high to the vault; it has thirty-two windows in the altar, twenty in the nave; forty-one columns; in the whole building fifty-two windows, one hundred and twenty columns; eight doors, three in the altar and five in the nave.

Furthermore, we are told that the feast of the opening of the new basilica was sanctified by virtue of 'the dedication of the temple' and 'due to the ordination of the bishop', but also, significantly, 'by the transfer of the body of the saint' (Sollemnitas enim ipsius basilicae triplici virtute pollet: id est dedicatione templi, translatione corporis sancti vel ordinatione eius episcopati).[63]

Bradley demonstrates that Cogitosus's description of the crowns (*coronae*) suspended as ornamentation over the tombs of Brigit and her bishop invite further comparison with continental church interiors.[64] There are striking similarities to the *regna* of the Visigothic rulers of seventh-century Iberia.[65] Votive crowns were particularly associated with royal churches in Merovingian Francia and Lombard Italy.[66] The crowns in Nantes Cathedral are also of interest as there are established close contacts between Ireland and Nantes in the seventh

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[61] *VCog*, 37 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.2–3 (p. 26).

[62] Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. by Krusch and Levison, ıı, 4 (pp. 63–64). See also x, 31 (pp. 526–37), on the similar layout of other churches described by Gregory.

[63] Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. by Krusch and Levison, ıı, 4, p. 64.

[64] Bradley, 'Archaeology, Topography and Building Fabric', p. 29.

[65] Petrie, 'Ecclesiastical Architecture', p. 203; Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 146, 160.

[66] *DACL*, vı, 2, cols 1842–59; xı, 2, cols 2769–70.

century.[67] The *coronae* may also be an allusion to the crown of virginity. Earlier in the *Life*, Cogitosus describes Brigit's veiling as a nun by Bishop Mac Caille in which the saint knelt at the altar 'suam virginalem coronam Deo omnipotenti offerens' (offering her virginal crown to almighty God).[68] Cogitosus constantly reiterates Brigit's virginity. He aims to 'bring to the public eye the greatness and the worth of the virgin radiant with good virtues' (ex quibus quanta qualisque Virgo virtutum bonarum florida, cunctorum oculis innotescat).[69] Furthermore, Paulinus of Nola and Gregory of Tours both inform us that crowns were similarly suspended over the tomb of St Martin at Tours.[70] This practice originated in the early fourth century when Constantine donated a crown to St Peter's basilica, where it was placed before the shrine of St Peter.[71] The Kildare crowns were then perhaps royal gifts from the new rulers of the area. The writing of the *Vita Brigitae* coincided with the ultimately successful attempts of the Uí Dúnlainge dynasty to gain the overlordship of Leinster.[72] During the seventh century control of the bishopric and abbacy of Kildare was controlled by the Uí Dúnlainge, which no doubt enhanced their political status.[73]

Cogitosus's choice of words is telling within this wider political context of the Irish Church. He uses terms like *basilica*, *civitas*, and *archiepiscopus* to deftly identify Kildare as a distinctly Roman Church and, by extension, one with more authority. In this manner he is presenting Kildare as a rival to Armagh, which also employed the term *basilica*.[74] His seamless use of Patristic sources, in particular Isidore and Augustine, leaves us in no doubt of Kildare's magnificence and primacy. This can be teased out further. For example, it seems likely that Cogitosus gleaned his terminology from Isidore, who stated that the order of

[67] Knight, *The End of Antiquity*, pp. 97–98, 158–59.

[68] *VCog*, 5 (p. 136).

[69] *VCog*, 1 (p. 135); trans. by Connolly and Picard, Preface, 3 (p. 11).

[70] Petrie, 'Ecclesiastical Architecture', p. 204.

[71] *DACL*, vi, 2, col. 1852.

[72] Byrne, *Irish Kings*, table 9, pp. 151–52; *AI*, *s.a.* 637; *ATig*, *s.a.* 636. The Uí Dúnlainge leader Fáelán mac Colmáin made great strides during the early seventh century to ensure his family's legacy as kings of Leinster, and indeed is himself named as king of Leinster in some annals (e.g. *CS*, *s.a.* 666). The Uí Dúnlainge eventually took over the kingship after the death of the Uí Máil king of Leinster Cellach Cualann in 715 and dominated the Leinster political scene for three centuries.

[73] Áed Dub (d. 639) was abbot and bishop of Kildare and his nephew Óengus mac Áedo Find was also bishop.

[74] *LA*, 15–16 (p. 186).

bishops was 'fourfold namely, patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans, and bishops' (Ordo episcoporum quadripertitus est, id est in patriarchis, archiepiscopis, metropolitanis atque episcopis).[75] Isidore explains that basilicas were royal habitations for kings, hence their use in Christianity because a church is a place of worship to God, the king of all.[76] This is more than a matter of terminology. The use of Isidore suggests an entire structure of church governance, which is echoed in the importance of Conláed to the archiepiscopal scheme of the *Vita Brigitae*. Cogitosus's use of the terms archbishop and basilica are readily intelligible in the Isidorian context. Similarly, again echoing Isidore, Cogitosus claims that Kildare is a great metropolitan city.[77] Once again, this goes beyond terminology to a suggestion of Kildare's jurisdictional and spiritual role. This merged with the political. The appearance of Kildare in the historical record, the rebuilding of the church, and the writing of *Vita Brigitae* all roughly coincided with the rise of the Uí Dúnlainge dynasty in Leinster.

While Cogitosus is our best evidence for the enshrinement and elevation of tombs in seventh-century Ireland, he is not our only witness. Tírechán and Muirchú also provide evidence that relics in seventh-century Ireland were enshrined within a church.[78] Like Kildare, Armagh claimed to have a basilica.[79] Indeed, the *Liber Angeli* contains a description of the 'city' of Armagh that bears much resemblance to Cogitosus's Kildare:

> In ista uero urbe Alti Machae homines Christiani utriusque sexus relegiossi ab initio fidei hucusque pene inseparabiliter commorari uidentur, cui uero praedictae tres ordines adherent uirgines et poenitentes <et> in matrimonio ligitimo aeclessiae seruientes. Et his tribus ordinibus audire uerbum praedictationis in aeclessia aquilonalis plagae conceditur semper diebus dominicis, in australi uero basilica aepiscopi et praesbiteri et anchoritae aeclessiae et caeteri relegiossi laudes sapidas offerent.

> In this city of Armagh Christians of both sexes are seen to live together in religion from the coming of the faith to the present day almost inseparably, and to this

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[75] Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, VII, 12.4.

[76] Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, XV, 4.11. The works of Isidore of Seville were very influential in early Medieval Ireland. See Hillgarth, *Visigothic Spain, Byzantium and the Irish*, for key articles examining the connections between Visigothic Spain and Ireland, and especially the influence of Isidore.

[77] *VCog*, 39 (p. 141).

[78] Tírechán, 42.7 (p. 156): the relics of Mucneus (which are discussed above); Muirchú, I, 27.7–9 (p. 100): the relics of Monesan (which are discussed in detail in chap. 3).

[79] *LA*, 15–16 (p. 186).

aforesaid (city) also adhere three orders: virgins and penitents, and those serving the church in legitimate matrimony. And these three orders are allowed to hear the word of preaching in the church of the northern district on Sundays always; in the southern basilica, however, bishops and priests and anchorites and the other religious offer pleasing praises.[80]

The relics contained by Armagh in the basilica were most likely those of the martyrs Peter, Paul, Stephen, Lawrence, and others, which Armagh claimed to possess.[81] Furthermore, 'in the southern church' Armagh also claims to have the relics of saints and the bodies of holy men from abroad:

> Nihilhominus uenerari debet honore summorum martyrum Petri et Pauli, Stefani Laurendi et caeterorum. Quanto magis quoque ualde ueneranda atque diligenter ab omnibus honoranda pro sancta ammiratione nobis beneficii prae omnibus ine<na>rrabilis, quod in ea secreta constitutione exstat sacratissimus sanguis Iesu Christi redemptoris humani generis in sacro lintiamine simul cum sanctorum reliquiis in aeclessia australi, ubi requiescunt corpora sanctorum perigrinorum de longue cum Patricio transmarinorum caeterorumque iustorum!

> Furthermore, it ought to be venerated in honour of the principal martyrs Peter and Paul, Stephen, Lawrence, and the others. How much more should it be venerated and diligently honoured by all because of the holy admiration for a gift to us, beyond praise above other things, (namely) that in it, by a secret dispensation, is preserved the most holy blood of Jesus Christ the redeemer of the human race in a linen cloth, together with relics of saints in the southern church, where there rest the bodies of holy men from abroad who had come with Patrick from across the sea, and of other just men![82]

The southern church (*aeclessia australi*) and southern basilica (*australi basilica*) are most likely the same building. However, the language may indicate that they should not be equated, as the terms *aeclessia* and *basilica* are semantically quite different.[83] The syntax is also ambiguous and does not seem to clearly equate or differentiate the *aeclessia* and the *basilica*. Further clarification may be found in the notes appended to the *Liber Angeli*. Here there are provisions for a weekly ritual veneration at the tomb of the martyrs in Armagh:

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[80] *LA*, 15–16 (pp. 186–87).

[81] Tírechán, II, 3.5 (p. 122).

[82] *LA*, 19 (pp. 186–89).

[83] See Appendix.

Fundamentum orationis: in unaquaque die dominica in Alto Machae ad sargif-
agum martyrum adeundum ab eoque reuertendum, id est 'Domine clamaui ad te'
usque in finem, 'Ut quid Deus repulisti' in finem, et 'Beati inmaculati' usque in
finem benedictionis et quindecim psalmi graduum.

A rule of prayer: on every Sunday in Armagh, when going to the shrine of the
martyrs and returning from it, namely 'Domine clamaui ad te' to the end, 'Ut quid
Deus repulisti' to the end, and 'Beati inmaculati' to the end of the blessing, and the
fifteen gradual psalms.[84]

Sargifagum martyrum is glossed in Irish in the margin of the *Book of Armagh*
as 'duferti martar'.[85] As pointed out by Bieler, Muirchú also refers to the 'fertae
martyrum iuxta Ardd Mache', which is surely the same site.[86] The term *fert* here
refers to a pagan-style grave mound,[87] while *martyrum* links the gravesite with
remains of early clerics and Patrick's followers referred to by Muirchú:

At ille noluit sancto terram illam dare altam, sed dedit illi locum alium in infe-
riori terra, ubi nunc est fertae martyrum iuxta Ardd Mache, et habitauit ibi sanctus
Patricius cum suis.

[Dáire] did not want to give the holy man that lofty place, but gave him another
place, lower down, where there is now the Burial-Ground of the Martyrs beside
Armagh, and there holy Patrick lived with his followers.[88]

C. J. Lynn's excavations at Armagh have revealed that 46–48 Scotch Street was
most likely the site identified by Muirchú, which was outside the *ráth* enclosing
the top of the hill.[89] Indeed, Lynn's excavations revealed dates possibly as early
as the sixth century for the cemetery.[90] This archaeological evidence, therefore,
would suggest that Muirchú's *fertae martyrum* (the *Liber Angeli*'s *sargifagum
martyrum*) was a separate church from the southern basilica (*australi basilica*),
which Bieler identifies as the main church at Armagh. This is supported by the

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[84] *LA*, 31 (pp. 190–91).

[85] *LA*, 31 (pp. 190–91). See also Bieler's comment, p. 241.

[86] Muirchú, I, 24.2 (p. 108).

[87] *DIL*, 2012 F 93. For discussion, see below, chap. 5; O'Brien and Bhreathnach, 'Irish
Boundary *Ferta*'.

[88] Muirchú, I, 24.2 (p. 108).

[89] Lynn, 'Excavations at 46–48 Scotch Street'. See also Bradley, 'The Monastic Town of
Clonmacnoise', p. 48.

[90] Lynn, 'Excavations at 46–48 Scotch Street', p. 83.

archaeological evidence, which places the ecclesiastical centre at the top of the hill. As highlighted by Lynn, the description of the weekly veneration to the *sargifagum martyrum*, in which a great numbers of psalms are to be sung, certainly gives the impression of a significant procession and this would tally with a walk to a site down the hill.[91] However, it does seem plausible that Muirchú's *fertae martyrum*, where Patrick's early followers lived, could be the same site as the southern church 'where rest the bodies of holy men from abroad who had come with Patrick from across the sea'.[92]

Regardless of whether the southern church should be equated with the southern basilica or the *sargifagum martyrum*, there were clearly two devotional sites containing relics at Armagh. The earliest chronologically would have been the burial site of the original founding clerics of Armagh. On Sundays the community walk down to this site singing praises and praying. The second site is the main church and basilica at Armagh. As was standard practice for the consecration of new churches, and as reflected in the nomenclature, this building was sanctified by the relics of the Roman martyrs, which may have been acquired by Armagh in the 630s.[93] Either way, both the Patrician texts in the *Book of Armagh* and the archaeological record demonstrate that the enshrinement of corporeal relics was of utmost importance. The *Liber Angeli*'s description of the singing of the Rule, in particular, provides clear evidence of the institutionalized veneration of corporeal relics at Armagh.

The ninth-century poem by Walahfrid Strabo on the martyrdom of Blathmac on Iona in 825 potentially provides further evidence of enshrinement and *elevatio* in the early Irish Church.[94] Although this is a later source, the account is still relevant as it testifies to the fact that by the mid-ninth century Columba's remains had been elevated and enshrined, and along similar lines to those of Brigit and Conláed.[95] The account is very detailed and evocative. According to the poem, Blathmac was murdered by the Danes because he refused to disclose

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[91] Lynn, 'Excavations at 46–48 Scotch Street', p. 73.

[92] *LA*, 19 (pp. 187–89).

[93] See below, chap. 4.

[94] *AU, s.a.* 825: 'Martre Blaimhicc m. Flainn o genntib in hi Coluim Cille'. For discussion, see Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', pp. 309–10.

[95] The poem was most likely composed in the 840s. For dating and for speculation that Walahfrid's information about Blathmac came from Diarmait, abbot of Iona in the second quarter of the ninth century, see Clancy, 'Diarmait *Sapientissimus*', pp. 218, 228–29. See also Clancy, 'Iona in the Kingdom of the Picts', p. 73.

the hiding place of Columba's remains. Walahfrid describes how the monks hid Columba's shrine of decorated metalwork on the approach of the raiders:

> Ecce furens maledicta cohors per aperta ruebat
> Tecta viris minitando pericula saeva beatis,
> Et reliquis rabida sociis feritate peremptis,
> Ad sanctum venere patrem, preciosa metalla
> Reddere cogentes, quis sancti sancta Columbae
> Ossa iacent, quam quippe suis de sedibus arcam
> Tollentes tumulo terra posuere cavato,
> Cespite sub denso gnari iam pestis iniquae.[96]

> See, the violent cursed host came rushing through the open buildings, threatening cruel perils to the blessed men; and after slaying with mad savagery the rest of the associates, they approached the holy father, to compel him to give up the precious metals wherein lie the holy bones of St Columba; but [the monks] had lifted the shrine from its pediments, and had placed it in the earth, in a hollowed barrow, under a thick layer of turf; because they knew then of the wicked destruction [to come].[97]

This poem reveals that Columba's remains were enshrined, and, crucially, that they were placed within the church on Iona, which indicates that there was not always a separation between reliquary and liturgical focus in ninth-century Ireland as often suggested by the archaeological evidence.[98] While the poem dates to the middle of the ninth century it is possible that they were preparing for the enshrinement of Columba's relics in Adomnán's time. Adomnán preserves an account of the visit of the elderly saint to Clonmacnoise, where such a large crowd met him that he was provided with special protection:

> Quandamque de lignis piramidem erga sanctum deambulantem constringentes a quatuor viris eque ambulantibus subportari fecerunt, ne videlicet sanctus senior Columba eiusdem fratrum multitudinis constipatione molestaretur.

> They bound together a kind of barrier of branches, and caused it to be carried about the saint as he walked, by four men keeping pace with him; lest the elder Saint Columba should be troubled by the thronging of that crowd of brothers.[99]

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[96] Walahfrid Strabo, *Versus Strabi de beati Blaithmaic*, ed. by Dümmler, p. 300, ll. 139–46.

[97] Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, i, 264.

[98] See Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', esp. pp. 130–38.

[99] *VSC*, i, 3 (pp. 24–25).

Doherty argues that the term *piramidem*, from *pyramis*, may have been chosen by Adomnán to describe a barrier of branches protecting the saint from the crowds as he approached Clonmacnoise, as the term can denote a sort of sarcophagus.[100] Adomnán cleverly depicted the saint as being borne ceremoniously into Clonmacnoise shielded by this barrier — still alive yet already within his shrine. This surely presaged the subsequent monumental reality.[101] The idea that the tomb cult of Columba was here being explored and predicted is given credence by the fact that a miracle was performed after an unassuming boy, looked down upon by the community and elders, approached the saint and tried to touch him.[102] Columba reprimands the Clonmacnoise community for seeking to prevent the boy from touching the hem of his cloak. Consequently, the saint blessed the boy's tongue and prophesied that he would, thus, receive eloquence and wholesome doctrine from God. Adomnán reveals that this boy became the famous Ernéne, renowned among all the churches of Ireland.[103] This episode is also significant since it is the first appearance of Columba in the *Life*, and by evoking an image of the saint's sacred remains within a reliquary, he is being 'treated like he is already a saint'.[104] The incident may also reflect some political difficulties in Adomnán's time. By hinting at the inferiority of Clonmacnoise to Iona, Adomnán may have been attempting to justify his own interference in the succession to the abbacy of Clonmacnoise.[105] Of course, Adomnán's other key text, *De locis sanctis*, reveals his intimate familiarity with the architectural setting for the exaltation of relics in the Holy Land.[106]

Part of Charles-Edwards's argument that Ireland was slow to adopt the cult of relics is based on his accurate observation that there did not exist in Ireland 'anything closely resembling the great suburban cemeteries, where "the basilicas of the saints" stood guard over their tombs'.[107] However, it does not have to follow that, therefore, the Irish were less concerned with monumentalizing

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[100] Doherty, 'The Meaning and Use of Pyramis'.

[101] See Woods, 'Crowd-Control in Sixth-Century Clonmacnoise', pp. 135–36, who provides an ingenious comparison between what he interprets as a wedge-shaped barrier described by Adomnán and modern crowd-control techniques.

[102] *VSC*, I, 3 (pp. 24–25).

[103] *VSC*, I, 3 (pp. 24–25).

[104] Clancy, 'Personal, Political, Pastoral', p. 47.

[105] Clancy, 'Adomnán and the Abbacy of Clonmacnois', pp. 211–12.

[106] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. and trans. by Meehan. For discussion, see O'Loughlin, 'Perceiving Palestine in Early Christian Ireland'; O'Loughlin, 'The Tombs of the Saints'.

[107] Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam', p. 268.

the cult of relics. While the Irish political situation and infrastructure did not lend itself to the building of such substantial graves and cemeteries, there is evidence that the Church in Ireland did attempt to emulate this architecture, in addition to the outlined documentary sources.[108] The phenomenon finds its clear physical manifestation in the 'tombs of the founder' memorialized in early monasteries and religious communities around the country in the form of cross-decorated pillars, upright cross slabs, slab shrines, box shrines of decorated stones, and shrine chapels.[109] Taking one example, the shrine on Illaunloughan in Co. Kerry provides an excellent model. Excavations revealed the elaborate and grand nature of this shrine with its slab shrine placed atop a raised plinth and decorated with scallop shells.[110] It is the most monumental structure on the island and was most likely constructed to venerate the bones of the saints of the island. The Illaunloughan shrine is situated on a large enclosed area, 7.6 m by 9 m and 1.5 m high, which was delineated by stones.[111] Entry was through the western side, 'where a short, gently rising flight of sandstone steps led up to a roughly paved area surrounding the shrine'.[112] Indeed, the extensive excavations that have taken place in the last twenty years have revealed that many of these shrines were raised. The Killoluaig slab shrine also appears to have been erected upon a mound enclosed by vertical stones, creating a defined sacred space.[113] Key also is Ó Carragáin's analysis of Irish shrine chapels, which are a small but distinctive group of diminutive mortared churches, dated to the eighth and ninth centuries, present at many of the major early Irish ecclesiastical sites.[114] These structures are architecturally significant as mortared churches were not common in Ireland until the tenth and eleventh centuries.[115] Like Crook's study by which he was inspired, Ó Carragáin concludes, on this evidence, that the cult of relics may have directly affected the design of churches, and more specifically, the development of mortared stone construction in Ireland.[116]

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[108] See also Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies' — an examination of the hagiographical sources reveals the preoccupation with the memorialization of saints' remains in early Ireland.

[109] See, for example, Herity, 'Tomb-Shrine of the Founder Saint'; Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, esp. chap. 11.

[110] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, pp. 56–62.

[111] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 56.

[112] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 60.

[113] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 56.

[114] Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting'.

[115] Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, pp. 147–51.

[116] Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', p. 133.

He presents ample evidence to indicate that these shrine chapels were constructed to enshrine the corporeal relics of the saint. Tomb shrines may have been an essential component of early monasteries and Leo Swan includes them among his criteria for identifying an ecclesiastical site.[117] There is evidence to suggest that the focal ecclesiastical and burial monuments in many early Irish monasteries were arranged in a recurring standard plan slightly apart from the domestic buildings, as seen at Killabuonia, Skellig Michael, and Reask.[118] Several recent works have emphasized their role in pilgrimage in Ireland during the early medieval period.[119] This archaeological evidence is corroborated by the eighth-century law text *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, which states that amongst the qualifications ennobling a church is the 'martarlaic fíréoin' (tomb shrine of a righteous man).[120] The context is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 below and indicates that the *martarlaic fíréoin* was a static tomb type monument containing the remains of the patron saint of the community. The use of the term *martar* suggests corporeal relics and the term *laic*, perhaps *loc*, 'place', would mean a fixed location rather than a shrine (usually rendered *scrín*) as translated by Breatnach.[121]

Both the early documentary sources and the archaeological evidence, therefore, indicate that the corporeal relics of some saints were enshrined and elevated at early Irish ecclesiastical sites. Beginning at the start of the ninth century we also have annalistic references to the placement of relics of saints within shrines.[122] However, these were most likely all portable shrines and could just as conceivably have enshrined associative relics as corporeal ones.[123]

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[117] Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites', p. 274.

[118] Herity, 'The Layout of Irish Early Christian Monasteries', pp. 106–14.

[119] Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*; O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*; Edwards, *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches*; Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*.

[120] *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, ed. by Breatnach, 3 (pp. 8–9). Written in the second quarter of the eighth century in Munster according to Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland', p. 457.

[121] For the terms *martar* and *scrín*, see Appendix.

[122] For example, see *AU*, *s.a.* 798, 809, 811, 818, 819, 831, 832. See chaps 5 and 6 below for discussion of the political contexts and relevance of some of these annalistic references. See *AU*, *s.a.* 800 for the enshrining of Conláed's relics and the enshrining of Rónán's relics *s.a.* 801, both silver and gold shrines.

[123] See Bannerman, 'Comarba Coluim Chille', p. 20, who asserts that these shrines would have housed corporeal relics.

Tomb Cults: Veneration and Miracles

Scholars have highlighted a key discrepancy that exists between practice in Ireland and elsewhere, concerning the distinct dearth of evidence for miracles taking place at tombs.[124] Indeed, there are few accounts of 'graveside' miracles in the earliest Irish hagiography. This does not necessarily mean that postmortem miracles at tombs were not a key element of relic cults in early Ireland. In her study of saints' cults in Brittany from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, Julia Smith has shown that oral traditions of postmortem miracles were sometimes more important than written accounts in sustaining a cult.[125] Often, the carefully constructed literary images of a saint are inaccurate reflections of the practical functioning of a cult and of how that saint was actually venerated by the laity.[126] Furthermore, scholars have more recently downplayed the importance of miracles in the cult of the saint. For example, Claudia Rapp argues that prayer, sometimes more so than miracles, played a central role in the 'day-to-day interactions between the holy man and his followers'.[127] Nevertheless, we do have written evidence from early Ireland that indicates the existence of tomb cults, and the *Hibernensis* testifies to the belief in the curative powers of veneration at holy places, which in the context of these canons referred to sites with saints' remains:[128]

> De locis sanctis colendis ac dignitate. a. Sinodus Vercellensis: Quanto cultu loca sancta honoranda sunt, vivis enim custodia, mortuis refugium, malis defensio et reliqua. b. Hieronimus: Hierusalem civitas sancta juvenum nutrix fuit, senum adjutrix, omnium receptaculum.[129]

> On revering holy places, and their dignity. a. The Synod of Vercelli: by how much reverence must a holy place be honoured, for the living protection, for the dead

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[124] Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', p. 36; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 348–50; Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande*, pp. 128–30, 266.

[125] Smith, 'Oral and Written', pp. 315–22.

[126] Smith, 'Oral and Written', pp. 322–23. However, in general Smith is arguing against the supremacy of corporeal relics.

[127] Rapp, '"For Next to God, You are My Salvation"', p. 67. In this she is expounding the use of a variety of material, especially epistolary sources, to gain a clear understanding of models of sanctity in Late Antiquity, and criticizes Peter Brown's overreliance on hagiography. The relative dearth of surviving similar sources for early Irish history makes a comparable study for Ireland very difficult.

[128] See *Hibernensis*, 44.8 (p. 176).

[129] *Hibernensis*, 44.10 (p. 177).

refuge, for the wicked defence, etc. b. Jerome: the holy city Jerusalem was a nurse for the young, a helper of the old, a place of retreat for all.

The vernacular laws also maintain the high status of these 'holy places'. A later gloss in the Heptads explains that a vacant church is still entitled to a third of the full rights of that church at its peak, on account of the 'taisi na naem indti' (relics of the saints there).[130] Indeed, the early ninth-century martyrology *Félire Óengusso* is quite clear that 'holy graves' have miraculous powers, and stresses the superiority of the burial sites of religious leaders over secular rulers.[131] The grave of Maél Ruáin is praised as such: 'occa lecht co nglaini ícthair cnet cech cridi' (at his grave with purity is healed the sigh of every heart).[132] The tombs of holy souls have similar healing properties: 'A anim cen chosnam ir-riched co ngili, dia éis íarna ríchtain íccfaid drucht a ligi' (His soul without striving, into heaven with brightness: after him, when he has attained it, the dew of his grave will heal).[133]

The early hagiography also contains allusions to tomb cults. Both of the earliest lives of Brigit indicate a tomb cult at her shrine. In Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae* we have two post-mortem miracles, which point towards a relic cult in Kildare.[134] Cogitosus recounts how the old door which Brigit used to enter the church was too small to slot into the new, grander portal.[135] Presented with this conundrum, the master craftsman prayed at Brigit's tomb all night for a solution and the subsequent morning the builders found that the old door had miraculously grown to fit perfectly into the space:

Et sic orans juxta monumentum Brigidae gloriosae noctem transegit; et mane surgens, oratione praemissa, valvam antiquam trudens ac ponens in suo cardine, januam conclusit totam

And so he passed the night praying by the glorious tomb of Brigit and getting up in the morning after that night, having completed his prayer with faith, he had the old door pushed in and placed on its hinges and it filled the whole doorway.[136]

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[130] *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, v, 124.

[131] Compare *Félire*, Prologue, ll. 221–24 (p. 26) with ll. 225–28 (p. 26). For dating, see Ó Riain, 'The Tallaght Martyrologies', pp. 21–38; Ó Riain, 'The Martyrology of Óengus', pp. 221–23; Dumville, '*Félire Óengusso*', pp. 43–47.

[132] *Félire*, ll. 221–28 (p. 26).

[133] *Félire*, Epilogue, l. 224 (p. 274).

[134] *VCog*, 34, 37 (pp. 140–41).

[135] *VCog*, 38 (p. 141).

[136] *VCog*, 38 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.6 (p. 26).

Furthermore, a miraculous millstone, positioned at the entryway to the cashel (*castellum*) surrounding the church, cures the illnesses of the faithful: 'Et fidelibus hunc Brigidae lapidem tangentibus, per quem ipsa supradictas virtutes fecit, morbos expellit et languores' (And drives out the diseases and afflictions from the faithful who touch this stone of Brigit, through which she herself performed the miracles recorded above).[137]

Adomnán's account of the simple funeral and burial of Columba indicates a lack of a corporeal-relic cult on Iona.[138] Herbert suggests that this is perhaps a reflection of the fact that Iona was not in direct competition with Kildare and Armagh, and consequently did not need to promote Iona as a site of a tomb cult.[139] She argues that instead of stressing Iona's association with Rome, Adomnán concentrated on alliances with secular powers. Nonetheless, an acknowledgement of the existence of tomb cults may be inferred from the account. Adomnán details a prophecy in the *Vita Columbae* in which the entire population of those provinces would attempt to row over to Iona on the death of Columba, and that the numbers would be so large that they would fill the island.[140] Unfortunately, inclement weather prevented anyone other than the monks on the island from attending the burial and his remains were placed in a simple grave. It could be argued that Adomnán and the community on Iona specifically wanted to deter pilgrims in order to maintain the integrity of the monastic island.[141] The tone of the story does seem to imply that this was an unusual state of affairs and that a grand funeral and shrine would have been expected. Bede recounts a comparable attitude. He reports that St Cuthbert did not want to be buried on Lindisfarne, lest the community be plagued by pilgrims and criminals seeking refuge: 'Sed et uobis quoque commodius esse arbitror ut hic requiescam, propter incursionem profugorum uel noxiorum quorumlibet' (But I also think that it will be more expedient for you that I should remain here, on account of the influx of fugitives and guilty men of every sort).[142] Cuthbert dictated that if the monks insisted on burying him there they should place his body within the church so that they could control visitors, while still retaining constant access themselves:

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[137] *VCog*, 36 (p. 140); 31.12 (p. 25).

[138] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 348–51.

[139] Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies', pp. 250–51.

[140] *VSC*, III, 23 (p. 230).

[141] MacDonald, 'Aspects of the Monastic Landscape', pp. 22–23.

[142] Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, 37 (pp. 278–79).

Si meam inquit dispositionem superare et meum corpus illo reducere uultis, uide-
tur mihi optimum ut in interioribus basilicae uestrae illud tumuletis, quatinus et
ipsi cum uultis meum sepulchrum uisitare possitis, et in potestate sit uestra an
aliqui illo de aduenientibus accedant.

'If', he said, 'you wish to set aside my plans and to take my body back there, it seems
best that you entomb it in the interior of your church, so that while you yourselves
can visit my sepulchre when you wish, it may be in your power to decide whether
any of those who come thither should approach it'.[143]

While we can appreciate the creation of routes and shrines to facilitate and
accommodate devotees, it is also clear that allowing public access to relics and
tombs brought its disadvantages, especially to those isolated communities who
were in search of the ascetic ideal. Nevertheless, there may be evidence to sug-
gest that the community on Iona in Adomnán's time was not necessarily averse
to receiving pilgrims. It is possible that Iona was preparing for the transla-
tion of Columba's remains into a shrine in the late seventh century. Adomnán
claims that the place where Columba's body rests is still visited by the light of
heaven and by angels, indicating a relic cult around his tomb in the late sev-
enth century.[144] Furthermore, Clancy and Márkus have rightly pointed out that
the reference to Columba's grave in *Amra Choluimb Chille* suggests that belief
in Columba's cult and posthumous worth had begun to develop immediately
after his death:[145] 'Fó lib lige a aí, ar cach saeth sretha sína' (You find his grave
good in its virtue appointed for every trouble of weather).[146] These lines are also
striking in their direct address to the audience, something not seen elsewhere
in the poem.[147]

Undoubtedly, the Irish documentary sources are lacking in testimony to
miracles taking place at saints' tombs, even though the accounts of oath taking
on tombs do testify to a belief in their sacred qualities.[148] However, it is perhaps
archaeology that provides the most compelling evidence for tomb cults in early
Ireland. The layout of many early Christian monasteries accommodated and
enticed pilgrims seeking to venerate the tombs of the saints. In many cases they

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[143] Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, 37 (pp. 278–81).

[144] *VSC*, III, 23 (p. 232).

[145] Clancy and Márkus, *Iona*, pp. 245–46.

[146] *Amra Choluimb Chille*, VII, 18, ed. and trans. by Clancy and Márkus, pp. 110–11.

[147] Clancy and Márkus, *Iona*, pp. 245–46.

[148] See below, chap. 5.

undertook these, often arduous, pilgrimages to seek miraculous intervention by the saint on their behalf. Slab shrines are possibly our earliest material evidence for the cult of relics in Ireland. The overwhelming evidence from these early tombs is that the veneration of corporeal relics was of utmost importance in the early Irish Church. Variously termed 'shrine-shaped',[149] A-roofed,[150] or gable shaped,[151] I will be referring to these simple tent-shaped tombs as slab shrines, following Charles Thomas.[152] They generally consist of two large slabs of stone leaned into each other to form the tent or 'A' shape, with another two smaller triangular shaped stones enclosing either end. They have been recorded in a number of sites such as Killabuonia, Kildreenagh, Illaunloughan, and Killoluaig, in the Iveragh Peninsula Co. Kerry, two at Temple Cronan, Co. Clare, one in Slane, Co. Meath, and one at Kilcholan on Inishmore, Aran Islands.[153]

As on the Continent, believers sought proximity to these relics to invite the intercessory power and *praesentia* of the saint. Françoise Henry was struck by the similarity between Irish slab shrines and the *martyria* of the first few centuries of Christianity, and Thomas argues that they were a version of the Mediterranean *cella memoriae* — the cell or enclosure around the accessible tomb with its corporeal relic.[154] Indeed, holes in the slab shrines at Killabuonia, Killoluaig, and Kilpeacan (and the window in the later shrine at Bovevagh, Co. Derry) correspond to the *fenestella* or *cataracta* of more monumental continental tombs.[155] These openings provided access for the faithful to observe the holy relics. They also would have facilitated the insertion of *brandea* so that pilgrims could 'dip' these items into the sacred space. Thomas remarked that bones were visible in 1966 in Temple Cronan and these bones are still visible today.[156] Henry also mentions the presence of a skull and bones in the Killoluiag

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[149] For example by Henry, 'Early Monasteries'.

[150] For example by Herity, 'Tomb-Shrine of the Founder Saint'.

[151] For example by White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*.

[152] Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*.

[153] Henry, 'Early Monasteries', pp. 96–112; Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, p. 142; Petrie, *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, pp. 454–55; Harbison, *Pilgrimage*, p. 153; Waddell, 'Kilcholan', pp. 86–88. There are also the remains of another slab shrine on Inishmaan, see Waddell, 'Archaeology of the Aran Islands', pp. 128–29. Outside of Ireland, Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, p. 142, also proposes that there could be a slab shrine at Ardwall Isle, Kirkcuds.

[154] Henry, 'Early Monasteries', p. 155; Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 140–41.

[155] Edwards, *Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 131.

[156] Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, p. 142. Still visible as of May 2013.

shrine.[157] Furthermore, the slab shrines at Kilpeacan, Illaunloughan, and Killa-bounia are contained within or directly associated with small rectangular enclosures.[158] The grave surrounds on these slab shrines bolster Thomas's theory that such shrines were direct imitations of the Mediterranean *cella memoriae*. On this basis, he suggests a date as early as *c*. 600 for some of the slab shrines.[159]

Slab shrines were of paramount importance to the development of the cult of a saint and provided a focal point for pilgrimage and veneration. The presence of translated bones within the Illaunloughan shrine, the largest of the extant slab shrines, confirms that these structures were used as reliquaries at least as early as the late seventh century.[160] The elevation and size of the shrine mound and its location in the area most visible to passing boats may suggest an associa-tion with maritime pilgrimage.[161] While it is referred to as a single structure it is arguably of more than one phase. The uppermost element is the slab shrine — a tent-shaped arrangement of four slabs of which the two side slabs sur-vive. This slab shrine stands on a plinth, itself surrounded by a terrace.[162] While stone cists containing human bones were discovered under the soil, there was no evidence of human remains within the slab shrine itself. However, given the evidence that these shrines were most likely used for containing bones which could possibly be viewed by visitors, and not necessarily for marking buried remains, I would suggest that the slab shrine may once have contained bones which have been lost. This would not be surprising considering the decrepit state of the shrine on excavation and the fact that the end stones were missing. Evidence from other surviving slab shrines shows the relatively rapid nature of dilapidation. In just the past fifty years the remains of bones in the Temple Cronan shrine have diminished, been hidden by growth, or disturbed in some manner, as far fewer fragments are visible today than were witnessed by Charles Thomas in the 1950s.[163] The holes in some of these early slab shrines were not (only) provided to satisfy a voyeuristic desire of early Irish Christians to gaze at the bones of a saint. Their purpose was to provide access to the bones and

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[157] Henry, 'Early Monasteries', p. 100.

[158] Henry, 'Early Monasteries', pp. 82–84, 95, 101–04.

[159] Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 143–44.

[160] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, pp. 60–66.

[161] See White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, chap. 6, on the presence of scallop shells and white quartz in the Illaunloughan structure.

[162] See Bourke, 'Review of Illaunloughan', for a critique of the confusing inconsistent use of terminology in the Illaunloughan study, in particular in relation to the shrine.

[163] As of May 2013.

to maximize the potential for intercession and healing. So, it is clear that slab shrines provide evidence of tomb cults in early Ireland. Nevertheless, the evidence for veneration and miracles at tombs in early Christian Ireland does lack the robustness of the material available for the Continent, even when taking into consideration the comparatively low survival rate of sources.

Burial ad sanctos

Lifelong veneration at the tombs of the saints could be supplemented by burial *ad sanctos* after death. The faithful desired to be buried near the saint to ensure proximity to his resurrection on the day of judgement, thus increasing their own chances of a similar fate. The custom of burial *ad sanctos* increased at such a rate in the early Christian Church that the most desired burial sites were a source of markedly unholy quarrelling.[164] Despite this popularity, key figures in the early Church disagreed on the efficacy of such a practice. Maximus of Turin asserted that those buried near the saints actually shared in their sanctity, claiming that by reposing alongside 'the holy martyrs we evade the darkness of hell, and even share in sanctity, as a result of their own merits'.[165] However, Augustine argued that burial near saints could only help the dead *indirectly*.[166] Indeed, Yvette Duval contends that the views of Augustine reflect the divorce between church prescriptions and popular practice. She shows that burial *ad sanctos* was intended to protect the corpse, ensuring that it would be able to rise again at the resurrection. It also served to 'associate' the dead with the saints, who would act as advocates for them at the Last Judgement.[167] As a specialist in epigraphy, Duval demonstrates that Christian inscriptions reveal a practice so widespread that one can speak of crowding the tombs of the saints, with the dead clustered as close as possible to the body or holy relics. This crowding is also evident on early Irish ecclesiastical sites such as Church Island and Illaunloughan in Kerry. The extensive excavations of the complex Illaunloughan shrine revealed that the eastern quadrant of the shrine mound had been used as a monastic cemetery, containing a number of burials nestled close to the slab shrine which was positioned atop a large terraced mound.[168]

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[164] See Duval, *Auprès des saints*.

[165] Maximus of Turin, *Homiliae*, ed. by Migne, 81 (cols 428–29).

[166] Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, ed. by Zycha, 18.22 (pp. 658–59).

[167] Duval, *Auprès des saints*, pp. 182–85.

[168] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, pp. 64–66.

The Irish evidence also indicates a developing concern about this over-crowding because attempts were made to preserve the integrity of cemeteries and holy places. Thomas Fanning's excavations at Reask revealed that the graveyard, oratory, and shrine were separated from the rest of the enclosure by a low stone wall.[169] Indeed, the division of ecclesiastical sites into inner and outer enclosures appears to have been the norm in early Ireland, as revealed by aerial surveys of Armagh, Kells, Kildare, Tuam, Lusk, Cashel, Killala, Finglas, Monasterboice, Lorrha, Glendalough, and Downpatrick.[170] Furthermore, an examination of the layout of these early monastic settlements indicates a pattern of locating the church at the centre of the site, which represented a hierarchy of sanctity around a sacred core. This was articulated by a series of concentric circular enclosures that regulated access to their own holy of holies: the relics of the saints.[171] The term *suburbana*, used by Irish authors such as Cogitosus, was borrowed from the Old Testament.[172] Indeed, the inspiration for this model comes from Old Testament descriptions of settlements such as the Levitical cities of refuge in Numbers.[173] Excavations undertaken by O'Brien reflect this pattern of an important shrine at the centre and the people buried outwards from this core. Indeed, O'Brien's analysis of the transition of Irish burial from pagan to Christian practices highlights that burial near the bones of the saint became a substitute for burial near the graves of the ancestors.[174] Burial *ad sanctos* reflects the assimilation of native and Christian ideas governing the manner in which bones could legitimate sites.

The *Hibernensis* attempts to enshrine this idea of a sacred core containing relics into Irish canon law, stating that 'omnis civitas refugii cum suburbanis suis posita est' (every city of refuge has been set up with its own suburbs).[175] The *Hibernensis* protects this core by clearly designating the different stratifications that surround it, separating the cemetery with its oratory and shrine from

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[169] Fanning, 'Excavation at Reask', pp. 74–79.

[170] Swan, 'Monastic Proto-Towns', p. 99.

[171] Doherty, 'Monastic Town', p. 57.

[172] *VCog*, 39 (p. 141); Joshua 21; Numbers 35. 3–7.

[173] Num 35. 1–8; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, pp.121–22; Doherty, 'Monastic Town', p. 60.

[174] O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian Burial', pp. 134–36. This transition from pagan to ecclesiastical burial is discussed in more detail below, chap. 3.

[175] *Hibernensis*, 44 (pp. 174–79).

the less religious parts of the site. Up to four boundaries around the holy site are recommended, divided according to status:

> Quatuor terminos circa locum sanctum posuit, primum, in quem laici et mulieres intrant, alterum, in quem clerici tantum veniunt. Primus vocatur sanctus, secundus sanctior, tertius sanctissimus. Nota nomen quarto defecisse.[176]

> He put four boundaries around the holy place: the first, in which lay people and women enter, another, in which only clerics come. The first is called holy, the second more holy, the third the most holy. Note the name for the fourth is unavailable.

Furthermore, severe punishments are sanctioned for those who violate the sanctity of this sacred core by committing violent crimes such as homicide.[177] These restrictions meant the settlement could preserve the holy of holies at its core despite any 'urban' expansion.[178] Aidan MacDonald has shown that the system of boundaries prescribed here is fully realized in the system of boundaries on Iona implied by Adomnán's description in the *Vita Columbae*. Within this system Columba's mortal remains lay within the innermost enclosure, from which lay people may have been excluded, or only allowed entry under strict supervision.[179]

Burial in the immediate vicinity of the relics was reserved for the most respected figures in the community — both religious and lay. The poem on the graves of the kings at Clonmacnoise glorifies the interment of important lay Christians, such as kings, within this inner *sanctum*.[180] In the *Life of Munnu* of Taghmon burial in the vicinity of the saint was considered a rare privilege.[181] In this text the saint grants this honour to the donor of the land and stresses that all buried in the graveyard were assured of heaven.[182] Herbert's analysis of burial *ad sanctos* in early Irish hagiography reveals the levels of political interference in the location of saintly burials. She makes a strong argument that burial privileges were bestowed on secular powers in return for grants to churches.[183]

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[176] *Hibernensis*, 44.5 (p. 175). For discussion, see Doherty, 'Use of Relics', pp. 97–98.

[177] *Hibernensis*, 44.6–9 (pp. 176–77).

[178] Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade', p. 81.

[179] MacDonald, 'Aspects of the Monastic Landscape', p. 23.

[180] Best, 'Graves of the Kings', pp. 164–70.

[181] *Vitae Fintani seu Munnu*, ed. by Heist. Possibly dated to before AD 800, see Sharpe, *Medieval Saint's Lives*, p. 334.

[182] *Vitae Fintani seu Munnu*, ed. by Heist, 20–21 (pp. 203–04).

[183] Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies', pp. 249–54.

Evidence for an archaeological expression of *deposito ad sanctos* in early Ireland may be provided by a plain stone box with sliding lid, discovered by a farmer within a stone-lined grave at Dromiskin, Co. Louth, *c*. 1862.[184] This reliquary contained a smaller inner reliquary of wood, which was also equipped with a sliding lid held in place with a bronze strip.[185] The Dromiskin reliquary is a heavy stone artefact and was, therefore, not easily portable, and may have housed relics. It was found beside the head of a skeleton of unknown gender. The inner, leather-covered wooden box contained a bronze ring-headed pin and charcoal, recalling the cloths filled with ashes and dust distributed by Rome and derided by Vigilantius of Calagurris. House-shaped reliquaries and those with flat sliding lids in the manner of a schoolchild's pencil case were common in early medieval Europe. Helmut Buschhausen has made a detailed study of these shrines, and concludes from their increased prevalence in graves from the fourth century onwards and from the engravings they carried, taken from sarcophagi, that they were specially made for placing in graves.[186] In graves dating from the fourth to the sixth centuries found along the Rhine, in England, and in former Pannonia the *scrinia* stood in niches at the head of the corpse.[187]

Raftery and Tempest noted in the Dromiskin burial that the pin with its various layers of protective covering must have been the important unit of the grave deposit, and were confused by this 'very elaborate offering'.[188] However, if the pin was associated with a local holy man or saint, its treatment becomes apparent. A small circular ring attached to the pin was depicted in a drawing made by Reade in 1862;[189] however, this ring was missing when the pin was acquired by the National Museum of Ireland in 1901.[190] Nevertheless, Eamonn Kelly's detailed analysis of the item confirms that this was certainly a ringed pin.[191] Small, plain-ringed pins tend to be late, but the circular ring depicted on the

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[184] The results of the discovery were first published in Reade, 'Ancient Interment'. For a fuller report, see Raftery and Tempest, 'A Burial at Dromiskin'.

[185] Reade, 'Ancient Interment', p. 206; Crawford, 'Descriptive List of Irish Shrines', pp. 174–75, VII, 3.

[186] Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia*, pp. 14–15, referenced in Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, p. 111.

[187] Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia*, p. 16, referenced in Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, p. 112.

[188] Raftery and Tempest, 'A Burial at Dromiskin', p. 136.

[189] Reade, 'Ancient Interment', between pp. 200–01.

[190] Raftery and Tempest, 'A Burial at Dromiskin', p. 134.

[191] For what follows, see Kelly, 'Ringed Pins of County Louth', p. 189.

original illustration of the Dromiskin example shows that this pin was not so late as to have been fitted with an oval ring. Accordingly, Kelly dates the pin to the sixth to ninth centuries, but, unfortunately, is not able to propose a specific date with confidence as it lacks sufficient diagnostic features. The Dromiskin pin is most likely a relic associated with some revered person. Whether the saint was directly associated with the monastery at Dromiskin, or the stone shrine containing the wooden box in which the pin was kept was brought to the monastery from elsewhere, is a matter for conjecture.

An examination of the historical record for Dromiskin may help to interpret this deposit. Dromiskin is the site of an early monastery, reputedly founded by disciples of Patrick, Daluanus, and Lugaid, possibly before the founding of the more prominent monastery of Louth.[192] Lugaid is assigned an obit of *c.* 516 and his feast day is celebrated on 2 November.[193] He has been associated with St Molua of the Eoganachta and his relics were said to preside at Dromiskin.[194] The second abbot of Dromiskin for whom we have historical evidence is Rónán mac Beraig, who is said to have died of the Buide Conaill in 665.[195] We can be confident of Rónán's association with Dromiskin and the Conaille Muirtheimne for the notes appended to the *Félire Óengusso* provide us with a full genealogy.[196] He was also commemorated until recent times by a well in the neighbourhood.[197] He may have been the Rónán whose curse was responsible for the madness of the legendary Suibne Geilt.[198] The most significant historical mention of the Dromiskin abbot for present purposes is the *Annals of Ulster* record *s.a.* 801 to the 'positio reliquiarum Ronaen filii Berich in arca auri 7 argenti' (placing of the relics of Rónán son of Berach in a gold and silver casket). This is a rare pre-tenth century annalistic reference to the actual act of placing relics with a shrine.[199] While this was obviously not the same shrine as the stone one found buried at

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[192] Stubbs, 'Early Monastic History of Dromiskin', p. 102; *Triadis Thaumaturgae*, ed. by Colgan, *Septima Vita*, 11, 131; *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 841–42 (p. 49).

[193] For Lugaid, see Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 408–09.

[194] Leslie, *History of Kilsaran*, pp. 164–77.

[195] *ATig, s.a.* 665; *CS, s.a.* 661; *AFM, s.a.* 664; *Félire*, 18 November (p. 235); Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 538–40.

[196] *Félire*, p. 243.

[197] Stubbs, 'Early Monastic History of Dromiskin', p. 103.

[198] Ó Riain, 'Materials and Provenance of "Buile Shuibhne"', pp. 176–77.

[199] The previous year records the placing of the relics of Conláed in a similar shrine: *AU, s.a.* 800, 'Positio reliquiarum Conlaid hi scrin oir 7 argait'.

Dromiskin it does indicate that this early foundation preserved, fully appreciated, and exploited the power of the cult of relics.

The discovery of this intriguing material manifestation of the cult of relics may illuminate the role of these relics in the interactions between churches and certain hierarchies within Irish society. David Thornton has investigated the origins, history, and genealogies of the Conaille Muirtheimne.[200] He provides the text of, and a brief commentary on, a hitherto unpublished genealogical tract about its ruling line and the related Louth dynasty of Uí Mathgnai, as well as the pedigree of the Uí Chrítáin abbots of Dromiskin with whom the Conaille were closely associated. Thornton elucidates the difficulties with the rather convenient genealogical scheme connecting Rónán with his Uí Chrítáin successors. The first attested member of the Uí Chrítáin to hold office at Dromiskin was Tigernach, son of Muiredach, who died in 879 according to the *Annals of Ulster*. He is referred to as bishop and *princeps*.[201] Thornton's reconstructed genealogy shows that the connection is chronologically unsound.[202] The saint would need to be three or four generations younger for the connection to be plausible. Furthermore, the *Vita S. Ronani* contains the assertion that Rónán's father Berach mac Crítáin was 'de Chonilibus', that is, of the Conaille.[203] It seems probable, therefore, that the plan was created to associate the abbots with their patron saint. On this evidence, 'it is tempting to connect Rónán's displacement of Lugaid as patron and the enshrinement of his relics in 801 with the emergence of Uí Chrítáin at Dromiskin'.[204] Such a development would not have been without precedent.[205] The timing of the promotion of a relic cult at Dromiskin becomes readily intelligible within this political context.

Seventh-Century Church Politics: The Role of Corporeal Remains

The cult of relics, in particular corporeal remains, played an essential role in some of the major political disputes in the seventh-century Irish Church. One of the most important of these was the struggle for primacy of the Irish Church

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[200] Thornton, 'Early Medieval Louth'; Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies*, chap. 6.

[201] *AU*, *s.a.* 879: 'Tigernach m. Muiredhaich episcopus, princeps Droma Inasclainn, extenso dolore pausauit'.

[202] Thornton, 'Early Medieval Louth', table and genealogy, pp. 146–47.

[203] Thornton, 'Early Medieval Louth', p. 150.

[204] Thornton, 'Early Medieval Louth', p. 150.

[205] Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', p. 52; Thornton, 'Early Medieval Louth', p. 150 n. 41.

between Kildare and Armagh. The hagiography of the seventh century has often been examined solely within this framework, which undervalues and misinterprets the motives of the writers. However, the political backdrop clearly influenced the commissioning of these texts.

By the end of the seventh century, Armagh, which claimed to have been founded by Patrick in the fifth century, was recognized as the leading Irish church.[206] Armagh focused on establishing Patrick as the greatest saint in Ireland and the apostle of the Irish. Armagh emerges in the seventh-century sources as an influential church with a respected patron. The extent of Armagh's authority can already be seen in Cummian's paschal letter, in which he refers to the authority of Patrick — 'papa noster'.[207] Acknowledging the primacy of Armagh's patron saint, this letter is all the more significant considering its early date, the lack of a special connection between Armagh and Cummian, and due to the fact that the primary recipient of the letter was Ségéne, abbot of Iona.[208] In a letter of reply from Pope-elect John IV, dated 640, to the northern Irish churches, the first name on the list of addressees is Bishop Tomméne of Armagh. While this might only be an indication of the order of the original letter to Rome (and thus merely testifies to Armagh's ambitions in the first place), it does suggest the possibility of Armagh's precedence over the northern churches at this stage. There can be little doubt that Armagh was already taking initiatives to further its sphere of influence.[209]

However, this path to pre-eminence was not without its turnings and endemic disease in the latter part of the seventh century seems to have played a part. A series of plagues wiped out or severely damaged some communities, especially the earliest primitive churches, which were subsequently taken over by some of Armagh's monastic rivals. Tírechán tells us that the community of Clonmacnoise 'hold forcibly many of Patrick's places since the recent plague' (qui per uim tenent locos Patricii multos post mortalitates nouissimas).[210] The biggest threat to Armagh's primacy was from Kildare. In his prologue to his *Vita Brigitae* Cogitosus declared that Kildare was a superior church ruled by

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[206] For a discussion of the growth of Armagh in the Church's first few centuries, see Doherty, 'Cult of Patrick'; De Paor, 'The Aggrandisement of Armagh'; Sharpe, 'St Patrick and the See of Armagh'.

[207] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, l. 208 (p. 84).

[208] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 426.

[209] Ó Cróinín, 'New Heresy for Old', p. 512; Doherty, 'Cult of Patrick', p. 69.

[210] Tírechán, 25.2 (pp. 142–43).

the 'Archiepiscopus Hibernensium Episcoporum' (archbishop of the bishops of Ireland).[211] He also stated that Kildare was 'caput pene omnium Hibernensium Ecclesiarum, et culmen praecellens omnia monasteria Scottorum, cujus parochial per totam Hibernensem terram diffusa, a mari usque ad mare extensa est' (the head of almost all the Irish churches with supremacy over all the monasteries of the Irish and its *paruchia* extends over the whole land of Ireland, reaching from sea to sea).[212] Irish archiepiscopal claims were implausible according to the *Hibernensis* and to papal protocol, but Kildare's claims were possibly more brazen than Armagh's, as at least the latter could appeal to the notion that Patrick was the special apostle of the Irish.[213] The explanation for Kildare's grandiose assertions possibly lies within the debate over the date of Easter. Kildare had most likely adopted the Roman Easter in the 630s along with the bulk of the southern churches. Armagh, however, did not conform to orthodox practice until perhaps as late as *c*. 688.[214] Kildare had an advantage that as an orthodox church it could argue entitlement to the title of principal see in Ireland where non-conformist Armagh could not. In this way, the Easter controversy provided Kildare with an opportunity to declare superiority over Armagh and also advanced Armagh's claims to primacy, claims that ultimately won the day.

Cogitosus's grand description of the ornate tombs of not only the founder Brigit but also of her bishop Conláed clearly embarrassed Armagh, given its lack of any bodily remains for Patrick. The *Liber Angeli* made specific reference to Armagh's jurisdiction over old churches whose antiquity was evidenced by the name *domnach*.[215] As Patrick was the primary missionary in Ireland, Armagh maintained that all such churches must have been founded by Patrick or one of his priests in the fifth century: 'Preest ergo quodam p(re)uilegio omnibus aeclessiis ac monasteriis cunctorum Hibernensium uel superna auctoritate summi pontificis illius fundatoris' ([Armagh] therefore has precedence, by a certain privilege and by the heavenly authority of the supreme bishop, its founder, over all churches and monasteries of the Irish).[216] Armagh supported these claims for superiority by emphasizing that it 'ought to be venerated in honour of the relics of the principal martyrs Peter and Paul, Stephen,

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[211] *VCog*, 2 (p. 135).

[212] *VCog*, 2; trans. by Connolly and Picard, Preface, 4 (p. 11).

[213] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 427.

[214] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 428.

[215] *LA*, 21 (p. 188).

[216] *LA*, 18 (pp. 186–87).

Lawrence, and the others' (uenerari debet honore summorum martyrum Petri et Pauli, Stefani Laurendi et caeterorum).[217] For, although Armagh could not claim the bones of Patrick, it did possess the blood of Jesus Christ in a 'sacred linen cloth'.[218] The ownership of a relic of 'the redeemer of the human race' was surely a trump card against Kildare, which could only claim the tombs of a nun and bishop. This 'battle for supremacy' appears to have been decided by an Armagh-Kildare pact appended to the *Liber Angeli* that posits a friendly agreement over jurisdiction between Patrick and Brigit, in which Brigit is given control and autonomy in Leinster, whereas the rest of Ireland was under Patrick's domination.[219] The 'pact' reads like a compromise between the claims made by Tírechán and Cogitosus.[220] However, Armagh is evidently granted primacy. It is clear that corporeal relics played a key role in the rivalry between the two churches.

Overall, the sources examined suggest that the cult of relics was central to the Irish experience of Christianity from an early date. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that the superiority of corporeal relics was well understood by early Irish authors and facilitated by the creation of shrines and tombs and the commissioning of hagiographies. The instances of corporeal relic veneration may not be as isolated as they appear at first glance, and may well be indicative of larger trends. I would argue that the Irish, while naturally different to their European counterparts, were actually more in agreement with continental practice than current historiographical models suggest. The next chapter will delve deeper into one manifestation of this cult of corporeal relics — the ritual of *translatio*.

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[217] *LA*, 19 (p. 186).

[218] *LA*, 19 (p. 186).

[219] *LA*, Appendix xi, 3 (32) [?] (pp. 190–91).

[220] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 54.

Translatio

The significance of *translatio* is intrinsically connected with the hierarchy of relics and the particular importance of corporeal relics within this scheme. This ritual belonged to a whole complex of ideas concerning places of burial. However, although *translatio* was often a key component in the creation of a saint, there was no standard practice common throughout the early Church, and perhaps many of these ceremonies were responses to specific political needs. Translations were taking place as early as the fourth century in the East and in Milan, in Gaul since the sixth century, but not until the seventh century in Rome.[1] Bede records some instances in seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England in his *Ecclesiastical History*.[2] However, John Blair argues that the grand translation ceremonies at places like Ely and Lindisfarne may not have been the norm in Anglo-Saxon England, as the bulk of the evidence indicates that most saints remained interred in graves.[3] The Irish evidence indicates the same variation in practice, even though some scholars have argued that *translatio* was less important in early Ireland compared to other jurisdictions.[4]

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[1] The authority on *translatio* remains Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*. See also Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*, pp. 49–67; Delehaye, *Origines du culte*, pp. 64–65.

[2] For example, see Bede's accounts of the translations at Ely and Lindisfarne, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, IV, 19 (pp. 390–96) and IV, 30 (pp. 442–44). For discussion, see Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint', pp. 45–48.

[3] Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster?', pp. 486, 490–94; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 145.

[4] For instance, Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 152, claims that the pattern of Irish saints' cults 'is less focused on the body of the saint, and translation never acquires the importance

Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae* includes perhaps the most well-known and analysed example of *translatio* in early Ireland and shares many similarities with the Frankish model.[5] Although an explicit description of the translation of the bodies of Conláed and Brigit is not provided it is most certainly implied in the detailed account of the rebuilding of Kildare church: 'In veteri nova res nascitur actu: hoc est, Ecclesia crescente numero fidelium de utroque sexu, solo spatiosa, et in altum minaci proceritate porrecta' (On account of the growing number of the faithful of both sexes, a new reality is born in an age-old setting, that is a church with its spacious site and its awesome height towering upwards).[6] The establishment and consecration of a new church was a common reason for translating relics, as established by Ambrose of Milan in the fourth century. However, as in the previous chapter, a wider investigation reveals that many of the earliest Irish historical sources make reference to translations of some form.

Bruscus

At the other end of the scale to the *Vita Brigitae* is an account of a seemingly informal *translatio* discussed by Tírechán in his collection of stories concerning Patrick. In this episode the dead priest, Bruscus, was buried alone in a deserted church. He haunted another holy man with dreams complaining of loneliness. Eventually the holy man dug up the bones with a shovel and moved them to his monastery. The extract is worth quoting in full:

> Et uenit in campum Rein et ordinauit Bruscum praespiterum et aeclessiam illi fundauit; qui dixit mirabile post mortem eius altero sancto, qui fuit in insola generis Cotirbi: 'Bene est tibi dum filium tuum habes; ego autem, tedebit me mors mea, quia solus sum in aeclessia in diserto, in aeclessia relicta ac uacua, et non offerent iuxta me sacerdotes'. In noctibus tribus somnium factus est: tertio die surrexit sanctus et arripuit anulum et trullam ferrumque et sepulcri fossam fodiuit et portauit ossa Brusci sancti secum ad insolam in qua sunt, et resticuit.

> And he came to Mag Réin and ordained Bruscus a priest and founded a church for him; Bruscus said something extraordinary after his death to another holy man,

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it would have in seventh-century Gaul or England'. He also states that 'apart from the obscure hints in Tírechán, evidence from Wales and Ireland is silent on the subject of translating bodies'.

[5] For example, see Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', pp. 134–40; Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 145–46; Bitel, 'Ekphrasis at Kildare'; Neuman de Vegvar, 'Romanitas and Realpolitik'.

[6] *VCog*, 37 (p. 141); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 32.2 (p. 25).

who was in the monastery of the family of Cothirbe: 'All is well with you because you have a son; I loathe my death because I am alone in a solitary church, a church deserted and empty, and no priests offer beside me.' For three nights (the holy man) had this dream; on the third day he got up, took [...] an iron shovel and dug up the moat of the grave and took the bones of holy Bruscus with him to the monastery where they (now) are, and (Bruscus) spoke no more.[7]

It has been argued that the lack of a Roman heritage in Ireland may have had a distinct influence on the practice of *translatio* in the early Irish Church, making it a more casual event than elsewhere in the West.[8] Tírechán's ostensibly casual and unceremonious description of the translation of the bones of Bruscus has been used to demonstrate this point.[9] It is true that archaeological evidence for burial practices in early Ireland does not show the same reluctance to disturb or move corpses as indicated by the evidence for contemporary Rome.[10] However, one could use the Bruscus episode to demonstrate that actually this sort of event was taken quite seriously in early Ireland. Tírechán clearly feels the need to justify the action. Bruscus stressed that he loathed his burial place and it was only after three nights that the holy man relented and granted Bruscus his wish. The removal of bones in this manner was clearly not everyday practice. As we have seen above, the use of visions to aid *translatio* was a common *topos* dating back to ancient Greece and was used to great literary effect by individuals such as Sozomen, Ambrose of Milan, and Gregory of Tours.[11] For example, Sozomen describes how unearthly visions aided Empress Pulcheria's discovery of the relics of forty soldiers who had suffered martyrdom under Licinius at Sebaste in Armenia.[12] Hence, we can appreciate the thoughtful construction employed by Tírechán, and perhaps a deliberate effort on his part to echo the literary prototype of *translatio* in continental sources.

Contrary to previous dismissals of this episode as only a vague suggestion of a translation, and one that was uniquely Irish in its relaxed nature, the Bruscus anecdote is comparable to contemporary continental accounts of translations.

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[7] Tírechán, 16.8–10 (pp. 136–37). De Paor, *Saint Patrick's World*, p. 159, provides a similar translation.

[8] See Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', p. 36.

[9] Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', p. 37.

[10] For an analysis of the Roman aversion to corpses, see Lindsay, 'Death-pollution and Funerals in Rome'.

[11] See above, chap. 1.

[12] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Walford, IX, 2 (p. 407).

The whole episode described by Tírechán may have been included to explain the presence of the bones of this saint, possibly marked by a shrine, in the existing monastery of the family of *Cothirbe*, as Bruscus was not local to the area. There are some striking parallels with Geary's study of relic theft and hagiography from the eighth to twelfth centuries. He explains that in order for a recently acquired relic to gain authority in its new community the account of the relic's translation had itself to become part of the myth of production.[13] Furthermore, the very act of transferring relics from one place to another (whether legally or not) actually authenticated their worth and holiness. This justification is even stronger in Tírechán as it is the saint himself who asks to be moved. Bruscus specifically wanted to settle there for eternity. It is a clear endorsement by Tírechán of the holiness and integrity of the *genus Cotirbi*. In this context Tírechán's use of the term *genus* is revealing, as it does not simply denote a 'family', as translated by Bieler, but more likely a ruling lineage or kindred.[14] It was also important for Tírechán to stress that Bruscus was buried in a deserted church, since removal of bones from such places was considered a legitimate cause for translation.

The name Bruscus appears on two ogham inscriptions on stones found in Munster, one in Kerry and the other in Cork.[15] Damian McManus has posited that perhaps the name derives from the Irish *brosc* 'thunder, noise'.[16] However, its mention on another inscription from Roman Britain has led Sharpe to suggest that this individual may have originated in Gaul or Britain.[17] Irrespective of his ancestry, the Bruscus in Tírechán clearly belonged to the early stages of the Irish Church. Indeed, in light of the discussion above (Chapter 2) regarding the appropriation of old, potentially missionary period, churches by Armagh, it is possible that the church of Bruscus is one such establishment. From a political perspective, then, Tírechán's *translatio* account may be a seventh-century explanation, or justification, for the removal of the corporeal relics of Bruscus. Alternatively, it could have been an attempt by Armagh to claim jurisdiction over the deserted ancient foundation.

This short extract also reveals information on the nature of Irish society, which was built around a system of kindred and clientship. The kin group or

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[13] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 213–14.

[14] See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 96–100, for an exploration of this term.

[15] MacAlister, *Corpus inscriptionum insularum Celticarum*, no. 63 (p. 67), no. 180 (p. 172).

[16] McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, p. 106.

[17] Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 150.

derbfhine (true kin) rather than the individual was the legal unit in early Ireland.[18] The *derbfhine* was an extended family of descendants along the male line of the same great-grandfather. The kin group was extremely important with regard to the ownership of property, inheritance, liabilities, and the provision of sureties.[19] The range of bonds of surety by which guarantees were made to answer for the default of another had a particular importance in Irish law. Social exclusion or exile was often the worst form of punishment for offenders of the law. The importance of community is demonstrated in the law texts. Certain crimes in early Ireland were punishable by exile and being cast adrift on the sea.[20] This togetherness and protection was sought in death as well as life, which we can observe in the burial of individuals close to their kinsmen or monastic leaders. Clearly, Tírechán and his audience would have sympathized with the plight of Bruscus. The undesirability of this state of affairs is confirmed by a later Patrician source. In the *Vita Tripartita* Patrick was so annoyed with one of his followers, Malach the Briton, that he condemned his foundation, Cell Malaich in the north-eastern corner of the southern Deisi, to be 'a house of one man': 'Níba ardd do chóngbáil hi talmain; bid tech n-óenfir do thech' (Your establishment will not be lofty on earth. Your house will be the house of one man).[21] The hagiographer adds 'Diing .u. bai do bethugud and co bráth' (This place will barely sustain five cows forevermore).[22]

Relics also offered a way of expressing both protection and solidarity in Late Antiquity. Relationships were fostered and strengthened through the trade of relics. Members of the Christian elite could enhance their social standing by passing relics from one community to another or by aiding the discovery of relics, because this made them 'privileged agents, personally involved in administering the loving kindness of God'.[23] In Tírechán's account, therefore, not only was an important bond created between the communities of the *genus Cothirbe* and *Mag Réin* but also the family of *Cothirbe* could bask in the acquisition of a new protector. Tírechán is possibly stressing the importance of the religious community here. Or is he lamenting the loss of

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[18] *DIL*, 2012 D2 32.

[19] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 12–14.

[20] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 219–21. This punishment was also a feature of Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* established in 697. See *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer, 45 (p. 30).

[21] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2328–29 (p. 120).

[22] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2330–31 (p. 120).

[23] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 93–94. See chap. 6 below for further discussion.

old churches, which is clearly a preoccupation of his *Collectanea*?[24] It is perhaps Bruscus's persistent plea to be moved out of his current resting place that reveals the most about Tírechán's mindset. It is also significant since it reveals the complexities facing the Church in general at the time regarding the interference with, and moving of, the remains of the holy dead. The Romans were slow to interfere with sacred graves as this contravened their laws. However, trade in relics became such big business that 'unauthorized' translations and thefts began to occur. Ecclesiastical law evolved to legislate against the unlawful removal of a relic. Due to these restrictions hagiographers tried to justify covert and furtive translations on various grounds.[25] This often involved the composition of stories in which the permission of the saint himself was granted. Tírechán's account of Bruscus, though earlier, fits in very well within this tradition.[26] The interference is justified since Bruscus himself expresses the desire to be moved from his original burial place. He targeted a particular holy man and plagued him with desperate dreams until the man relented. Tírechán stresses that it was not until the third day that the body of Bruscus was finally disinterred. The timeframe reminds us of the resurrection of Jesus. While the Bruscus episode is not a case of relic theft, the mood of the account, the nocturnal setting, and the justifications of Tírechán all invite comparisons with Geary's analysis of *furta sacra*.[27]

The terms used by Tírechán further consolidate his position within this tradition. He states that the holy man brought an *anulus*, along with a shovel, to Bruscus's grave. As evidenced in Bieler's translation above, scholars have had difficulty translating this term, despite the fact that in the majority of classical and Christian sources the word signifies a ring or something ring shaped. Occasionally, it can denote a signet ring or seal, as in Genesis.[28] Classical and medieval Latin dictionaries concur. In the detailed descriptions of the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus *anulus* refers to the rings attached to the Ark for

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[24] For example, Tírechán, 7.2 (p. 128), 22.4 (p. 140), 26.2 (p. 142).

[25] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 112–17.

[26] The thirteenth-century *Life of St Abbán* records an instance of relic theft that also fits snugly within the continental milieu. According to his hagiographer, after Abbán's death in his monastery of *Magh Arnuidhe*, his body was stolen by locals of his birthplace, *Ceall Abbain*. See *Vita Sancti Abbani*, ed. by Plummer, I, 30–31. For dating, see Ó Riain, 'St. Abbán: the Genesis of an Irish Saint's Life'.

[27] See Geary, *Furta Sacra*, esp. chap. 6.

[28] Genesis 38. 18.

portability.[29] Both Luke and Numbers use the term as a finger ring.[30] Isidore and Augustine also use the word in the sense of a ring as the term is used in English — that is, anything ring-shaped, for example jewellery, a hole, a curl of hair, or a body part.[31] Later medieval uses include a pig-ring, chainmail, and a door handle. The term is rarely used in early Irish texts. The glosses on the St Gall manuscript of Priscian indicate that the word in Ireland was understood to mean a ring, as it is translated into Old Irish as *bréfean*, meaning a small ring or hole.[32] It is clear, therefore, that although the use of this word has puzzled Patrician scholars, an examination of the etymology of the term and its uses reveals that the only possible translation can be 'ring'. One can assume any connotation thereafter. For example, Doherty interprets the term to mean a round bowl, inferring that *anulus* in this case refers to a ring-shaped vessel within which to place the bones of Bruscus while they were being transferred.[33] His contextual argument is strengthened by a recent article by Jim Mallory who includes an item called a *drolmach* in his study of Iron Age ceramics.[34] This was a native Irish term created to describe a big wooden vessel with rings. This interpretation does fit broadly with the discussion above, as a bowl is a round object. It does seem more likely, however, that the term should refer to something that can more confidently be translated into our lexicon as a 'ring'.

I propose that the *anulus* in Tírechán was the holy man's signet ring, which would have confirmed his monastic affiliations if questioned while digging.[35] This would counteract potential grave-robbing allegations by providing proof of identity and support claims that he was moving the bones to a more appropriate spot. Christians, like their non-Christian counterparts, wore rings as a sign of their station, occasionally having them engraved with a religious symbol or bedecked with a jewel.[36] The ring in some cases was used as a seal but it also was a symbol of conjugal fidelity. Bishops received rings as an episcopal

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[29] Exodus 26. 29.

[30] Luke 15. 22; Numbers 31. 50.

[31] For example, Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, xvi, 6; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, i, 13.

[32] *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 112, ll. 29–30; Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien*, B, p. 83, translated it into the French as *anneau* or *boucle*.

[33] Doherty, 'Cult of St Patrick', p. 61.

[34] See Mallory, 'The Conundrum of Iron Age Ceramics', p. 187.

[35] Dr Anthony Harvey and Jane Power of the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources* provided valuable assistance in deciphering and interpreting this term.

[36] Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, xix, 32.

honour conferred in the rite of consecration. Other ecclesiastics such as nuns and consecrated virgins wore plain rings on their wedding finger as a reminder of their betrothal to their heavenly spouse. There is plenty of evidence for the wearing of episcopal and pastoral rings in sixth-century Gaul, which may be an indication that they were similarly popular in the contemporary English and Irish Churches.[37] Clovis I, writing to the Gallican bishops in 510, promised to pay close attention to their letters provided that they sealed them with seals of their pastoral rings. Avitus, bishop of Vienne, writing to Apollinaris, bishop of Valence, requested that his monogram might be engraved on his ring, and a ring was found in the tomb of Bishop Ebregesilus of Meaux, a monk of the Columbanian school, when it was opened in the seventh century. However, evidence for the wearing of rings by the general clergy seems absent from the Irish historical record. So, unless the individual in question here was an abbot, bishop, or other higher ecclesiastic, we may have to leave the subject open to debate.

Nevertheless, the laws concerning burial in the *Hibernensis* may support the hypothesis that the holy man in Tírechán would have needed some sign of authority to validate his grave digging. Book xviii (*De Iure Sepulturae*) in these canons discusses the provision of Christian burials and the interface between burial in ancestral graveyards and church cemeteries, and is concerned with proper burial and issues of jurisdiction over dead bodies.[38] A particular preoccupation here is ensuring that the church exacts a share of burial costs and inheritance. For example, the canons advise that each man ought to purchase a grave, that lots must be cast between the church and ancestral cemetery on a man's death, and that the bulk of a man's possessions belong to his most recent abbot. The canons clearly enunciate that removal of a body from one church to another is permissible by the dead man's kinsman. However, the kinsman must pay the burial price and request that the *princeps* dig up the grave:

> a. Sinodus eadam: Quicumque discesserit de sua ecclesia, et in alia ecclesia sepultus fuerit, cujus propinquus veniens, corpus mortui mutare volens, dabit pretium sepulcri prioris, hoc est vaccam et vestimentum ejus commune, et rogabit principem loci, ut basilicam ejus foderet.[39]

> The same synod: whoever has gone from his church and was buried in another church, if his relative comes wishing to move the dead body he shall pay the burial

[37] For what follows, see Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, p. 114.

[38] *Hibernensis*, 18 (pp. 55–59).

[39] *Hibernensis*, 18.7 (p. 58).

> price of the former, that is, a cow and his communal clothes, and he shall ask the *princeps* of the place to dig the grave for him.

Indeed, an exploration of the instances in which *translatio* occurs in the sources has the potential to reveal insights into the society in which they took place. Tírechán's description of the *translatio* of Bruscus portrays the changes in burial happening at that time. His reference to the *sepulcri fossa* on this occasion implies that the relocation is made from a pagan style grave to a Christian tomb or shrine.[40] Circular ring-ditched enclosures were a common feature of late Bronze Age and Iron Age burial in Ireland. As O'Brien explains, this type of enclosure may be defined as a circular area surrounded by a *fosse* or ditch.[41] The Irish quickly adopted the Roman extended inhumation in the second century AD but it was used in conjunction with older rites. According to O'Brien, the material evidence shows that, while new burial practices were absorbed and adapted, one native custom that remained constant was the use of circular ditches and the survival of ancestral cemeteries.[42] The documentary evidence backs this up. Key in the *Hibernensis* is an emphasis on the importance of ancestral cemeteries and an allowance for their upkeep: 'Sinodus Romanus decrevit: Vir sive mulier in suo paterno sepulcro sepeliatur. Dicitur enim: Maledictus omnis homo, qui non sepelitur in sepulcro patrum suorum' (The Roman Synod decreed: man or woman should be buried in their paternal cemetery. For it is said: cursed is the man who is not buried in the grave of his fathers).[43] The Church, thus, effectively promoted the Christian saint as a replacement for the ancestor by fitting his burial into this ready-made cultural matrix. It is illuminating to read Tírechán within this context. This adds an extra dimension to the translation of Bruscus against the backdrop of the still evolving Irish Church and its efforts to work with native society.

However, while pagan-style burial was tolerated to a certain extent the canons also indicate that secular burial sites were being discouraged in the eighth century, since they warn against burial amongst the wicked:

> De eo, quod magis visitantur martyres in deserto humati, quam inter malos homines .a. In vitas patrum legimus: Martyres inter malos sepultos ab angelis visitari, sed tamen tristes reversos angelos. Inde Dominus ait: Placuerunt terrae sabbata

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[40] Doherty, 'Monastic Town', p. 53.

[41] O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian Burial', p. 130.

[42] O'Brien, 'Pagan or Christian?', p. 149.

[43] *Hibernensis*, 18.2 (p. 56).

sua. b. Hieronimus: Sciendum, quod majus culpae est, angelos aut homines malos fraudare. c. Item: Post resurrectionem multi audisse voces testantur dicentium angelorum: transeamus ex his sedibus.[44]

Concerning martyrs buried in a remote place, they are visited more than those buried amongst wicked men. a. In the lives of the Fathers we read: martyrs buried amongst the wicked are visited by angels, however, the angels return sadly. Then the Lord said: the earth enjoyed its Sabbaths. b. Jerome: it should be noted, which is the greater fault, to defraud angels or men. c. Likewise: after the Resurrection many testified that they heard voices of angels saying: let us pass from these places.

The appropriation of these graveyards was facilitated by the translation of relics into the site. Indeed, this practice is well articulated in another section of Tírechán's *Collectanea* where he explicitly describes the difference between pagan and Christian graves, in his account of the death and burial of Ethne and Fedelm, daughters of King Loíguire. Of particular importance in this anecdote is the building of a church next to the graves of the holy women and Tírechán's explanations of the terms used to describe the burial place.[45] He writes here that the heathen Irish call this burial a *fert* but which, he says, is a *relic*:

> sepilierunt eas iuxta fontem Clebach et fecerunt fossam rotundam in similitudinem fertae, quia sic faciebant Scotici homines et gentiles, nobiscum autem reli[c...] uocatur, id est residuae puellarum

> they buried them beside the well of Clébach, and they made a round ditch after the manner of a *fert*, because this is what the heathen Irish used to do, but we call it *relic*, that is, the remains of the maidens.[46]

This indicates that the name of the type of round ditch enclosure was being Christianized from *fert* to *relic* within the Irish language. Or at least this appears to be Tirechán's explanation for the etymology. *Ferta* played a crucial role as territorial boundary markers in early Irish law, so these burials may have been politically motivated.[47] The Church's success in this regard was its assimilation of the pre-existing culture in which ancestral bones were already recognized as legitimizing sites.

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[44] *Hibernensis*, 50.3 (pp. 208–09). For further discussion, see O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian Burial', p. 135.

[45] Tírechán, 26.20 (pp. 144–45).

[46] Tírechán, 26.20 (pp. 144–45).

[47] For discussion, see below, chap. 5; O'Brien and Bhreathnach, 'Irish Boundary *Ferta*'.

Monesan

Tírechán's description of the *translatio* of Bruscus is clearly not an account of
a grand ceremonial ritual, in line with some continental accounts. Even so, the
comparisons with the 'alternative' *translatio* tradition of relic-thefts are inform-
ative, as is the depth it adds to our understanding of Irish canon law concerning
burial. However, Muirchú does describe an episode involving the translation of
a body that fully elucidates the solemnity associated with the custom.

The holy Monesan died immediately after being baptized by Patrick and was
buried on the spot. This is followed by an astonishing prophecy by the saint.
He predicted that the relics of the girl would be removed twenty years after her
death and translated with great honour to a neighbouring chapel:

> Tunc ille repletus Spiritu Sancto eleuauit uocem suam et dixit ad eam: 'Si in Deum
> credis?' Et ait: 'Credo'. Tunc sacro Spiritus et aquae lauacro eam lauit. Nec mora,
> post ea solo prostrata spiritum in manus angelorum tradidit. Ubi moritur ibi et
> adunatur. Tunc Patricius prophetauit quod post annos uiginti corpus illius ad pro-
> pinquam cellulam de illo loco tolleretur cum honore.

> He then, full of the Holy Spirit, raised his voice and said to her: 'Do you believe
> in God?' And she said: 'I do believe'. Then he bathed her in the bath of the Holy
> Spirit and the water. Immediately afterwards she fell to the ground and gave up her
> spirit into the hands of the angels. She was buried on the spot where she died. Then
> Patrick prophesied that after twenty years her body would be conveyed to a nearby
> chapel with great ceremony.[48]

It is perhaps this extract out of all the early sources that illuminates similarities
between the descriptions of Irish practice and accounts of *translatio* on the
Continent and Anglo-Saxon England. Muirchú's exposition evokes a compa-
rable sense of spectacle and solemnity. Admittedly, this is merely one example.
Nevertheless, it does indicate that bodily remains were venerated, translated,
and enshrined. There are many common features: the ceremony, the prophecy,
the period of time between death and the translation, the enshrinement, and
the posthumous veneration. According to Muirchú, 'the relics of the maiden
from across the sea are there an object of worship to the present day' (cuius
transmarinae reliquiae ibi adorantur usque hodie).[49]

[48] Muirchú, I, 27.7–9 (pp. 100–01).
[49] Muirchú, I, 27.9 (pp. 100–01).

The sense of occasion implicit in Muirchú's description of Monesan's reburial evokes the great *adventus* festivals that surrounded the translation of relics on the Continent. Brown has shown that the ceremony of the *adventus* of a saint was used by bishops in sixth-century Gaul to harness the public's devotion and garner support for their own positions.[50] It was an important political tool. But this was not just a Christian phenomenon. The *adventus* ritual, which developed in classical antiquity, was employed in later periods to celebrate the triumphal arrival of rulers, bishops and other holy men, and the relics of saints. The ceremony of *adventus* in the ancient world saw to it that rulers were honoured and gained prestige.[51] Subjects also enhanced their own dignity by taking part in the ceremony and honouring their leader. Religious overtones were occasionally discernible in the arrival ceremonies of Roman emperors, since these rulers were often viewed as divine beings who were exalted as saviours and benefactors.[52] In Victricius of Rouen's famous sermon *De laude sanctorum* he described a secular *adventus* ceremony in which people crowded onto the rooftops and all displayed enthusiasm for the arrival of the emperor into the city.[53] Victricius praised the comparisons between imperial custom and the ceremony that initially welcomed a saint into the community, which was then re-enacted each year at his festival.[54] As Brown emphasizes, the ceremony was intrinsically connected with the exercise of power.[55] As outlined above (Chapter 1), this tradition dated from at least as early as ancient Greece. The body of the founder-hero Theseus was miraculously discovered by Cimon and translated to Athens. By bringing back Theseus's relics to Athens Cimon boosted his own career, receiving several honours.[56] Cimon's ceremonial enshrinement of the national hero was a key act in the battle for popularity and primacy with his rival, Themistocles. Anthony J. Podlecki argues that there can be little doubt that Cimon carefully planned the discovery and exploited the results for his own gain.[57]

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[50] See Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', p. 249.

[51] See MacCormack, 'Change and Continuity', esp. pp. 725–26.

[52] MacCormack, 'Change and Continuity', p. 721.

[53] Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', p. 247.

[54] Victricius, *De laude sanctorum*, ed. by Mulders and Demeulenaere, 2–3 (pp. 71–74); trans. by Clark, pp. 378–79.

[55] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, p. 98.

[56] Plutarch, *Cimon*, ed. and trans. by Perrin, 8.7 (pp. 428–29).

[57] Podlecki, 'Cimon, Skyros and "Theseus' Bones"', pp. 141–43.

In Christian contexts the rite of *adventus* was often associated with the translation of a saint into a new shrine. The arrival at their new destination was usually celebrated with great pomp, as it meant the introduction of new protections for the community. The *adventus*, deposition, and exhibition of relics served as a means of communication for the impressive staging of power — both religious and lay. The involvement of the laity in the *adventus* and *translatio* of relics emphasizes the importance of acquisition for the public good, for defence and protection.[58] In Merovingian Gaul the arrival of relics was very popular with the public and, as such, was a key event in the cultural and religious life of the community.[59] The bishop played a pivotal role as a link between the people and the saints and thus orchestrated the *adventus* celebrations, which were attended by clerics and laymen of all ages and classes of society. Some imperial *adventuus* in late antique Rome had particular importance as statements of legitimacy and of victory over enemies.[60]

A comparable context could perhaps explain the *Annals of Ulster* record of the 'aduentus reliquiarum filii Eirc ad ciuitatem Tailten' (arrival of the relics of the son of Erc into the city of Tailtiu), *s. a.* 784. Tailtiu (Teltown) was the site of the famous *Óenach Tailten*, traditionally presided over by the king of Tara.[61] It is difficult to ascertain exactly who the phrase 'filii Eirc' refers to in this instance. It could be a reference to the famous Erc of Slane, or may be the 'Macc Ercae', whom Patrick consecrated bishop of Ardstraw, according to Tírechán.[62] The construction *aduentus reliquarum* is also used in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* to refer to the 'aduentus reliquiarum sanctorum Hibernensium quas Mac ind éicis congregauit' (Arrival of the relics of the saints of Ireland, which the son of the poet brought together).[63] The same phrase is used again under 6 September in the martyrology, in relation to the female saint Sciath being brought to Tallaght: 'Aduentus reliquiarum Scéthi filiae Méchi ad Tamlachtain' (Arrival of the relics of Sciath, daughter of Méchi, to Tallaght).[64] Another entry marks

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[58] Bozóky, *La politique des reliques*, chap. 5. See also Holum and Vikan, 'The Trier Ivory', pp. 116–18.

[59] Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 109–11.

[60] Humphries, 'From Emperor to Pope?', pp. 30–36.

[61] Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 31, 90–91.

[62] Tírechán, 48.2 (p. 160). Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 169; Byrne and Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick', p. 99.

[63] *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. by Best and Lawlor, 5 October (p. 77).

[64] *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. by Best and Lawlor, 6 September (p. 68). Sciath was from

'Mael Ruain cum reliquiis sanctorum martirum et uirginum ad Tamlachtain uenit' (the arrival of Máel Ruain into Tallaght with the relics of saints, martyrs, and virgins).[65] This is one of only a few full sentences in a martyrology characterized by quite laconic records, perhaps reflecting the importance of this event to the composers of the text. This may have been the occasion of the dedication of the monastery, which according to the *Annals of the Four Masters* took place in 774.[66] The description in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, although short, highlights that this was a significant occasion. It is clear that Máel Ruain's arrival with the relics was no casual event. There may have been a particular *céli Dé* (or perhaps even just a Tallaght?) interest in *adventus* and *translatio*. Martyrologies, by their very nature, are preoccupied with relics as part of saints' cults, so it is difficult to base any conclusions on references in these texts. However, some of the source material composed within a *céli Dé* milieu implies a well-developed awareness of the efficacy of the cult of relics in promoting saints' cults.[67] For example, a later note to *Félire Óengusso* claims that relics of many saints and martyrs, including Peter, Paul, and the Virgin Mary were brought to Tallaght on 1 October.[68] The preface to this text also commemorates the relics consecrated to St Michael at Tallaght.[69]

Possibly the most evocative description of an *adventus* in early Christian Ireland is provided by the typically eloquent Adomnán:

> Auditoque eius accessu uniuersi undique ab agellulís monasterio uicinís, cum hís qui ibidem inuenti sunt congregati, cum omni alacritate suum consequentes abbatem Alitherum sancto Columbae, quasi angelo domini obuiam, egresi ualum monasterii, unanimes pergunt; humiliatísque in terram uultibus eo uiso cum omni reuerentia exosculatus ab eis est; ymnísque et laudibus resonantes, honorifice ad eclesiam perducunt.

> When they heard of his approach, all those that were in the fields near the monastery came from every side, and joined those that were within it, and with the utmost

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Ardskeagh, parish of Buttevant, Co. Cork. Dumville, '*Félire Óengusso*', pp. 42–43, argues that her relics may have been translated to Tallaght before 825.

[65] *Martyrology of Tallaght*, ed. by Best and Lawlor, 10 August (p. 62).

[66] *AFM*, *s.a.* 769: 'Céd chongbhail Tamhlachta Maile Ruain'.

[67] Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland*, and Haggart, '*Céli Dé*', have both shown that, contrary to earlier scholarly conclusions, the *céli Dé* were not an organized reform movement, but regular religious dedicated to ascetic ideals, chastity, charity, excellence in learning, and pastoral care.

[68] *Félire*, 1 October, *scholia*, p. 221.

[69] *Félire*, 1 October, preface, 11, 12–13.

eagerness accompanying their abbot Alither they passed outside the boundary-wall of the monastery, and with one accord went to meet Saint Columba, as if he had been an angel of the Lord. On seeing him they bowed their faces to the earth, and he was kissed by them with all reverence, and singing hymns and praises they led him with honour to the church.[70]

Here, Adomnán illustrates a grand occasion in which Columba arrived into Clonmacnoise with great fanfare, almost like a victorious leader, implying that Clonmacnoise was subordinate to Columba and Iona. The comparison between Adomnán's account and those of imperial *aduentuus* is bolstered by his description of Clonmacnoise as a city with a boundary wall. This passage echoes the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem. On the Sunday before his death on the cross, Jesus entered the city framed by crowds of people welcoming him by waving palm branches and crying out his praise.[71]

There are also clear parallels here between *Vita Columbae* and the *adventus* ceremonies described by Gregory of Tours in his *Libri historiarum*. In one case he recounts the scandal over Bishop Maroveus's refusal to comply with St Radegund's request that he place the relic of the True Cross in the convent, after it had arrived at the monastery of Poitiers. Radegund was forced to appeal to King Sigibert for another bishop to accord the relics their due respect and ceremony. The King duly obliged:

> Ad hoc enim opus beatus Eufronius urbis Toronicae episcopus iniungitur. Qui cum clericis suis Pectavo accedens, cum grandi psallentium et caereorum micantium ac thymiamatis apparatu sancta pignora, absente loci episcopo, in monastirium detulit.

> He enjoined the blessed Eufronius, Bishop of Tours, to perform this task; who, coming with his clergy to Poitiers, in the absence of the bishop of their city, brought the holy relics to the monastery with much chanting of psalms, with pomp of gleaming tapers and incense.[72]

As Brown explains, the key theme here is one of consensus. The saint arrives at a shrine, and this arrival is the occasion for the community to show itself as a united whole, embracing its otherwise conflicting parts in welcoming him. The example from the *Vita Columbae* is all the more potent as it precedes the section

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[70] *VSC*, I, 3 (pp. 24–25).

[71] John 12. 12–13.

[72] Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum X*, ed. by Krusch and Levison, IX, 40 (p. 464); translation provided by Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', p. 239.

discussed above in which the barriers protecting the saint from the swarming crowds emulate a sort of living shrine. This reinforces the similarities with the *adventus* ceremonies in which relics were welcomed into a city. The promotion of the cult of a saint and his relics was a crucial component in the maintenance of power by ecclesiastical leaders, due to the special connection between a saint and the community. In the creation of status, public opinion counted for as much as family wealth and pedigree, as so convincingly argued by Brown.[73] Similarly, in Ireland, church and secular leaders aligned themselves with the holiest and most powerful saints and subsequently invested in the success and promotion of that cult.

Returning to Muirchú's description of the death and burial of Monesan, it must be emphasized that the form of enshrinement he portrays is particularly significant. Contradicting the bulk of archaeological evidence, which indicates an Irish preference for the erection of a chapel directly over an original gravesite, Monesan's body was translated into an existing church nearby. This reflects the Eucharistic connections with relics, but more importantly, we are provided here with a clear early reference to the enshrinement of relics within a church, in addition to the examples provided by Cogitosus and elsewhere examined in the previous chapter. Ó Carragáin's research has shown that early ecclesiastical sites in Ireland were more often characterized by a separation between the main congregational church and the principal reliquary focus.[74] These literary accounts, therefore, provide an alternative version of relic veneration in Ireland, sometimes at odds with the archaeological evidence.

To fully appreciate the meaning of this episode it is necessary to examine the context, especially for the figure Monesan, even though it is impossible to establish the historicity of this saint. The only sources of information on Monesan date to centuries after she is supposed to have lived. Muirchú claims that she was the 'exceptional daughter' of a British king, and that she was 'full of the Holy Spirit' at a time 'when all of Britain was still hardened in the cold of disbelief' (Quodam igitur tempore cum tota Britannia incredulitatis algore rigesceret cuiusdam regis egregia filia, cui nomen erat Monesan, Spiritu Sancto repleta).[75] When Monesan repeatedly refused marriage her exasperated and sorrowful parents brought her over to Ireland on account of the fame and holi-

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[73] Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', p. 243.

[74] See Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', esp. pp. 130–38.

[75] Muirchú, I, 27.2 (p. 98).

ness of Patrick.[76] Muirchú is clearly stressing the superiority, not only of Patrick and his church, but also of the Irish Church in general at this time.[77]

James Carney stresses the importance of theology when analysing this episode, as Patrick was preaching against the backdrop of the Pelagian heresy.[78] The necessity of baptism and the importance of the Holy Spirit are stressed in this story, clearly reflecting Roman, and not Pelagian, principles. According to Pelagian doctrine, being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit would not be enough to ensure Monesan's salvation, let alone her ultimate translation and veneration as a saint.[79] In fact, Muirchú's account of the virgin Monesan has been controversially examined as proof of the survivals of Pelagianism in early Ireland.[80] This episode has rarely been analysed. However, O'Loughlin's examination of Muirchú's deliberate biblical references, especially in relation to baptism, hints at its richness.[81] The Monesan anecdote is also part of a section of the text that has obvious political undertones. It is certainly clear that these particular sections of Muirchú's narrative appear very different from the rest of the text. They may in fact have been written at a different time to the rest of the *Vita Patricii*, and in all likelihood formed part of a separate book.[82] The episodes concerning Mac Cuill, Monesan, and Coroticus are all focused on the Isle of Man and can be interpreted within the context of Armagh's claim to ecclesiastical control of this island. Mac Cuill was, apparently, an evil and cruel ruler who, after a failed attempt to capture and kill Patrick, converted to Christianity

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[76] Muirchú, I, 27.3–5 (p. 98).

[77] Carney, *The Problem of St Patrick*, pp. 123–27, unconvincingly argues that the story, in essence, represents historical fact. He contends that he is supported by the two mentions of Monesan in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*. However, this text was written much later than Monesan's argued *floruit* and therefore cannot provide evidence that she was a real historical individual.

[78] Carney, *The Problem of St Patrick*, pp. 123–27.

[79] See Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*. This book examines the hypothesis that the literary and visual images of Christ in the early churches of Britain and Ireland were formed in a context that was profoundly influenced by Pelagianism. See Márkus, 'Pelagianism', for some problems with this work.

[80] Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, p. 96.

[81] See O'Loughlin, 'Muirchú's Theology of Conversion in his Vita Patricii', esp. p. 129 n. 43.

[82] Bieler, 'Muirchú's Life of St Patrick'. See also, O'Loughlin, 'The Capitula of Muirchú's *Vita Patricii*'.

and was baptized by the saint.[83] He ultimately became bishop of Man and the episode provides Armagh with an episcopal presence in Man. The Monesan episode also stresses Armagh's authority on Man. David Howlett argues that the form of the name, spelled *Moneisen* in the chapter headings, might indicate that Muirchú originally wrote *Moneissan*.[84] This would suggest that the composition of the name derived from the Romano-British place name *Mona*, 'Anglesey', the Latin *–issa < ipsa* as a term of endearment, and the Brittonic and Goidelic diminutive suffix *–an*, meaning 'dear little girl from Anglesey'.[85] If we follow the usage of Bede, *Mona* should be interpreted as the area encompassing Anglesey and Man and this episode could imply Patrick's authority over Man.[86] However, this may be a case of reading too much into the sources. Arguably, the most logical segmentation of the name would be to take the Mo– as representing the honorific Mo–/Do– so common among Irish saints.[87]

Howlett underlines the importance of the political context of hagiography in seventh-century Ireland, pinpointing the metropolitan claims of Wilfrid as the catalyst for the composition not only of Muirchú's *Vita Patricii* but also for the pioneering activities of Cogitosus before him.[88] He goes as far as to claim that debate surrounding the unwillingness of the Irish to accept subordination to Wilfrid is the new endeavour out on the 'periculossum et profundum narrationis sanctae' (deep and perilous sea of sacred narrative) referred to by Muirchú as having been first embarked upon by Cogitosus.[89] Howlett, therefore, disagrees that Muirchú was referring to hagiographic narrative in general, as argued by other authors.[90] Notwithstanding a reluctance to embrace Howlett's whole argument, he does make some important points. He claims that through his positioning of Patrick as superior to certain individuals in Britain (Macc Cuill,

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[83] Muirchú, I, 23 (p. 102).

[84] Howlett, *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni*, p. 153.

[85] Howlett, *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni*, p. 153.

[86] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, I, 8 (pp. 34–36) and II, 9. (pp. 162–66); Doherty, 'Muirchú and the Cyclops'; Hamp, 'Varia: Further on Brittonic Mona', pp. 167–68.

[87] I owe thanks to Thomas Owen Clancy for this suggestion.

[88] Howlett, *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni*, pp. 180–83.

[89] Muirchú, Preface (2) (pp. 62–63).

[90] Scholars differ slightly as to what the new enterprise referred to by Muirchú may have been. For example Kenney, *Sources*, p. 359, suggests the movement inaugurated by Cogitosus was 'the preparation of connected biographical narratives in the place of popular legends and disconnected *acta* and *memorabilia*'; Esposito, 'On the Early Lives', p. 123, proposed that the

Coroticus, Monesan), Muirchú is building metropolitan claims for Patrick and Armagh as a reaction against possible encroachment from the Church in Britain. 'The point of these stories is to bring kings, royal persons, and believers along a stretch of the western coast of Britain from Strathclyde to Anglesey, and even those beyond, the Picts and Saxons to the east, into relationship with Patrick.'[91] Nevertheless, there is no definite need to use ecclesiastical politics in Britain as an explanation for Muirchú's motivations. Doherty argues that Armagh was confident in its superiority as an ancient apostolic church, and that the activity of Theodore or Wilfrid had little impact upon the Irish.[92] Muirchú composed his *Vita Patricii* in the late seventh century, by which time Armagh's position as leader of the Irish churches was established. Armagh's interest in Man should be interpreted within this context. For this reason, we can perceive the use of the cult of corporeal relics in the promotion of jurisdictional interests and authentication of claims to power and control within the political context of the seventh-century Irish Church.

While an understanding of this complex political background greatly enriches our reading of Muirchú, comparing his exposition with Tírechán's text can reveal further insights. Like the fate of Ethne and Fedelm described by Tírechán, Monesan died immediately after baptism. Presumably, this was their eternal heavenly reward for their selfless surrender unto God. In fact, Tírechán provides an explanation for their deaths:

> Et babtitzatae sunt et candida ueste in capitibus earum. Et postulauerunt uidere faciem Christi, et dixit eis sanctus: 'Nissi mortem gustaueritis, non potestis uidere faciem Christi, et nissi sacrificium accipietis.' Et responderunt: 'Da nobis sacrificium, ut possimus Filium, nostrum sponsum, uidere', et acciperunt eucharitziam Dei et dormierunt in morte.

> And they were baptized, with a white garment over their heads. And they demanded to see the face of Christ, and the holy man said to them: 'Unless you taste death you cannot see the face of Christ, and unless you receive the sacrament.' And they

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new domain was the formalization of the *vitae* of Irish saints and dismissed Bury's (*The Life of St. Patrick*) conjecture that Muirchú was referring to the writing of the lives of the Irish saints in Latin, not Irish, on the grounds that previous Latin lives of St Brigit had already been written by Ultán and Ailerán.

[91] Howlett, *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni*, p. 183.

[92] Doherty, 'Muirchú's Mac Cuill'.

answered: 'Give us the sacrament so that we may see the Son, our bridegroom', and they received the Eucharist of God and fell asleep in death.[93]

Indeed, the similarities between the two stories can be fleshed out further. They both depict the fate of royal women born to pagan kings who wish to convert to Christianity, though of course, a crucial difference is that Monesan was the daughter of a foreign king. Nevertheless, it is possible that the Patrician authors were making specific judgements on royalty. Again the text provides us with a possible explanation. Patrick informs the girls, 'Ego uero uolo uos regi caelesti coniungere dum filiae regis terreni sitis credere' (Now I wish to join you to the heavenly king since you are daughters of an earthly king, if you are willing to believe).[94] Both episodes portray associated relic cults that evolved around the bodily remains after burial. Patrick made an earthen church at the burial site of Ethne and Fedelm in Tírechán's account, explicitly confirming this practice in Ireland.[95] The *Vita Tripartita* provides a little more detail, significantly implying that the bodies of the girls were translated to Armagh some time later:

> 7 ró adnaigthe inna ingena in dú sin, 7 ró edbrad Sendomnach Maigi Aí do Pátraic in eternum: 7 asberat alaili tuctha taissi inna n-ingen do Árd Machae et ibi resurrectionem expectant

> and the girls were buried in that place, and *Sendomnach Maige Ái* was offered to Patrick for eternity; and some say that the remains of the girls were taken to Armagh, and there they await the Resurrection.[96]

Similarly, as we have seen above in Muirchú, the remains of the virgin Monesan were translated twenty years after her death to a more fitting place to aid veneration.[97]

Another interesting possible reference to *translatio* is provided by Muirchú and concerns the body of Patrick himself. He relates a story in which an angel advised Patrick that after his death his body should be placed in a cart and carried by two untamed oxen: 'Elegantur duo boues indomiti et pergant quocumque uoluerint <in plaustro portantes corpus tuum>' (Let two untamed oxen be chosen and let them go wherever they will with the cart that carries

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[93] Tírechán, 26.15–16 (pp. 144–45).

[94] Tírechán, 26.12 (pp. 142–43, 145).

[95] Tírechán, 26.21 (p. 144).

[96] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 1164–66 (p. 64).

[97] Carney, *St Patrick*, p. 124, also discusses the similarities between the two accounts.

your body).[98] Wherever the oxen stopped, Patrick's body was to be buried and a church erected over him: 'et ubicumque requiescunt aeclessia in honorem corpusculi tui aedificetur' (and wherever they stand still, there a church in honour of your body shall be erected).[99] Muirchú reports that a church was being built recently above the body.[100] These statements are quite significant. The construction of a church over the body of Patrick echoes the continental tradition of building basilicas over the graves of saints, and again demonstrates that the Irish were acutely aware of the intimate connection between churches and the tombs of the saints in the early medieval period.

This passage clearly derives from Samuel, and shows Muirchú's deft use of biblical imagery.[101] This Old Testament passage recounts how God punished the Philistines with plagues for stealing the Ark of the Covenant from the Israelites.[102] The episode accentuates the power of God and the futility of resisting him. In order to repent the Philistines set the Ark on a new cart, together with a guilt or trespass offering of five gold tumours and five gold mice symbolizing the plagues they had been afflicted with. Significantly, they used two nursing cows that had not previously been yoked to pull the cart. If the cows, against all their natural impulses, followed the road to Israel it would prove divine intervention, as was the case. Muirchú's selection of this Bible story is telling. It is deeply critical of those who do not follow the Lord and abide by his rules. It preaches that we should trust in his ways. God's providence even takes notice of brute creatures, and serves its own purposes by them. The oxen in Muirchú's story steadily drew the cart, despite the fact that they were wild and untamed, as they were guided by the will of God: 'exierunt nutu Dei regente ad Dun Lethglaisse, ubi sepultus est Patricius' (guided by the will of God, they went out to Dún Lethglaisse, where Patrick lies buried).[103] The Ark was one of the most valuable objects in the Old Testament and was taken as a symbol and agent of God's power. It was essentially a reliquary, and the descriptions of it bear a striking resemblance to the twelfth-century St Manchán's Shrine, located in Boher, Co. Offaly. Both objects are temple- or church-shaped, adorned with

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[98] Muirchú, II, 11.1 (pp. 120–21).

[99] Muirchú, II, 11.1 (pp. 120–21).

[100] Muirchú, II, 12 (p. 120).

[101] 1 Samuel 6.

[102] On a side note, see Carew, *Tara and the Ark of the Covenant*, for a fascinating account of a search for the Ark of the Covenant by British-Israelites on the Hill of Tara from 1899–1902.

[103] Muirchú, II, 11 (2) (pp. 120–21).

precious metals, and fixed with rings so that they could be slowly carried in procession via two long poles on either side.

Other Documentary Evidence for *translatio*

The church canons also provided for the translation of saints' remains. The *Hibernensis* defines the meaning and virtues of martyrs, and lists why and when translations should take place. Periods of trial or migration are presented as occasions that justify and account for the practice of moving relics.[104] Typically, this would have been the translation of the body from a 'foreign' burial place to the ancestral cemetery. In a climate of bitter struggles for possession of holy relics, the Irish canonists attempted to clarify the issue of translation and division of relics. Book XLIX (*De martyribus*) deals with these issues. One chapter within this book discusses the transmigration, *transmigratio*, and translation of the bones of various apostles.[105] The canons explain the principle of *translatio* in the early Irish Church, citing three admissible reasons specified by Augustine:

> Agustinus ait: Tribus causis martyres transmutanti sunt. Prima, cum necessitas persecutorum loca eorum adgravaverit, secunda, cum difficultas locorum fuerit, tertia, cum malorum societate gravantur.[106]

> Augustine said: There are three cases when martyrs should be translated. The first, when the force of persecutors weighs down on their places; the second, when the places are experiencing difficulty; the third, when evil company oppresses them.

It has been argued that the apparently casual and 'less reverential' attitude in the Insular sources towards bodily remains is evident in Bede's account of Aidan's relics, in particular Colmán's division of said remains.[107] However, like the example of Bruscus above, it is just as easy to argue that the opposite sentiment is being expressed in the literature here. The episode is a clear example of translation, elevation, and enshrinement within an Insular milieu. Bede records the death and burial of the Irish missionary and founder of Lindisfarne in 651.[108] Aidan's relics were exhumed, and translated on the occasion of the con-

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[104] *Hibernensis*, 18.2 (p. 56).

[105] *Hibernensis*, 49.5 (p. 205).

[106] *Hibernensis*, 49.8 (p. 206).

[107] Thacker, '*Loca Sanctorum*', p. 37; repeated in Overbey, *Sacral Geographies*, p. 5.

[108] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, III, 17 (pp. 262–66).

secration of a new church on the island, some time before the death of Fínán, his successor, in 661.[109] After his defeat at the Synod of Whitby, Fínán's successor Colmán left Lindisfarne, but not without first taking some of Aidan's relics with him: 'Abiens autem domum Colman adsumsit secum partem ossuum reuerentissimi patris Aidani; partem uero in ecclesia cui praeerat reliquit, et in secretario eius condi praecepit' (Colman, on leaving, took with him some of the bones of the reverend father Aidan. He left some in the church over which he had presided, directing that they should be interred in the sanctuary).[110] The relics were placed inside the church in a prominent position on the right side of the altar, and after his division of the relics Colmán ordered that they be placed in the *secretarium* and not back into the ground, indicating an appreciation of the importance of enshrining the relics within the church. I would argue that this episode in Bede reveals a high degree of sensitivity on Colmán's part, and a keen awareness of the significance of the cult of corporeal relics and the relics of the founder to both the existing community on Lindisfarne and the new community to which he would give Aidan's relics. The *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 668 record Colmán's departure from Lindisfarne with the relics, and his foundation of a new community on Inishbofin.

In actual fact many of the sources surviving from this period deal with *translatio* in some form. As discussed above, Columba's relics may have been translated and enshrined as early as during Adomnán's abbacy of Iona. At the very least they were enshrined before the year 825, as we learn from Walahfrid Strabo's ninth-century verses on the martyrdom of St Blathmac of Iona.[111] It appears then that, at some stage between Adomnán's account and that of Walahfrid, Columba's body was translated, and judging from the grand description of the new tomb the translation must have been accompanied by some ceremony and celebration. Indeed, Bannerman argues that Columba's relics may have been translated and enshrined in the seventh century.[112] Given the usual nature of *translatio* and the timeframe, Bannerman's theory is convincing. However, a more conservative interpretation of the available evidence would

[109] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, III, 25 (p. 294).

[110] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, III, 26 (pp. 308–09).

[111] Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, I, 263–65.

[112] Bannerman, 'Comarba Coluim Chille', pp. 29–32; MacDonald, 'When were St Columba's Corporeal Relics Enshrined?', p. 20, adheres to what he terms 'the generally accepted view' that Columba's remains reposed in their original grave rather than in a shrine when Adomnán wrote.

pinpoint the middle of the eighth century as a likely time for the *translatio* to have taken place. The spate of enforcements of a 'Law of Columba', amongst other things, indicate that something important had taken place shortly before 753.[113] Also, Iona reached a peak of art and metalwork production at that time, which would facilitate the construction of a shrine.[114] Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that in the seventh century the Iona clergy were already planning for the translation of Columba's body, as evidenced by the examination of the *Vita Columbae* above. However, the relics of Columba do seem to have been translated later in the ninth century: from Iona to Dunkeld in 849 and then from Dunkeld to Kells in 878.[115]

The hagiographer of the *Vita* of Colmán Elo used the vehicle of visions to expound the disinterment and *translatio* of the Lynally saint, inviting comparison with the *translatio* of Bruscus.[116] Indeed, this episode also provides an insight into the ceremonies that accompanied these translations in early Ireland, and the associated enshrinement and elevation of the relics:

> Post aliquantulum temporis, sanctus Colmanus apparuit in visione et precepit ut ossa sua elevarentur de sepulcro terre, ne vltra absconderentur. Tunc omnes fratres et populi per circuitum elevaverunt reliquias eius et posuerunt eas in ornato scrinio cum magno honore et psalmis et ympnis et canticis spiritalibus laudantes et benedicentes Dominum, cui est honor et gloria in secula seculorum. Amen.[117]

> After some time, St Colmán appeared in a vision and commanded that his bones be lifted from the burial ground, no longer hidden. Then all the brothers and the surrounding people lifted up his relics and placed them in an ornate shrine with great honour and singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and praising the Lord, to whom be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

The annals also offer insight into the translation of corporeal remains in the early period. Between 734 and 794 the annals refer in seven separate entries to the *commotatio* of the relics of nine different saints. The *commotatio* of the

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[113] *AU*, *s.a.* 753.

[114] Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 80–81, 374–75.

[115] See Bannerman, 'Comarb Coluim Cille', pp. 29–43; Bannerman, 'The Scottish Takeover', pp. 73, 92; Broun, 'Dunkeld', pp. 105 n. 41, 108–09.

[116] Part of the 'O'Donoghue group' in the Codex Salmanticensis, whose texts have been dated to as early as the eighth century. For Colmán Elo and information on the *Life*, see Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 203–05.

[117] *Vita Sancti Colmani de Land Elo*, ed. by Heist, 52 (p. 224).

martirum of Peter, Paul, and Patrick is recorded in 734.[118] The same phrase is used in relation to Trian of Kildalkey in 743,[119] and Erc of Slane and Finnian of Clonard in 776.[120] The *Annals of Ulster* also record the *commotatio reliquiarum* of Ultán in 785,[121] Kevin and Mo-Chua moccu Lugedon in 790,[122] Tólae in 793, and Trian in 794. The term *commotatio* is often used to denote *translatio* in continental texts and is therefore translated by the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources* as 'agitation or disturbance'.[123] Indeed, the editors of Irish texts have often defined the phrase along these lines.[124] However, it is more likely that *commotatio* refers to the bringing of relics on tour as understood by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill.[125] This is compatible with the historical context as relics were often paraded around certain areas to invoke the intercession of the saint in times of crisis, to collect revenue, or promulgate laws.[126] In this sense the Hiberno-Latin *commotatio*, 'revolution, circuit', may be more comparable to the classical Latin *commutationes annuae*, 'the changing of the seasons'.[127]

The ninth-century annals supply more concrete evidence. The *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 824 record that Bangor was attacked and the relics of Comgall shaken from their shrine: 'Orggain Benncair ac Airtiu o gentibh 7 coscradh a derthagi 7 reilgi Comghaill do crothadh asa scrin' (The heathens plundered Bangor at Airte, and destroyed the oratory, and shook the relics of Comgall from their shrine).[128] Again, the shrine is associated with the oratory and presumably was within it, suggesting a connection between liturgical and reliquary focus on some Irish sites. A poem later appended to this entry clearly refers to the *translatio* of Comgall's bones to Bangor's daughter house at Antrim, brought on by the attack: 'Bidh fir fir, do dheoin Airdrigh inna righ, berthair mo chnama cen

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[118] *AU, s.a.* 734.

[119] *AU, s.a.* 743.

[120] *AU, s.a.* 776.

[121] *AU, s.a.* 785.

[122] On Mo Chuae, see Doherty, 'Cluain Dolcáin'.

[123] Harvey and Power, *Non-Classical Lexicon of Celtic Latinity*, I, 159.

[124] Reeves, *Life of Saint Columba*, p. 313, defines the phrase *commutatio martyrum* as the disinterring and enshrining of relics. Similarly, Hennessy translates the term *commotatio* as 'transposition' in his edition of the *Annals of Ulster*, p. 189.

[125] *AU*, ed. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, p. 187.

[126] Discussed in more detail below, chap. 5.

[127] Picard, 'Le culte des reliques', p. 52.

[128] This event is also recorded in *AU, s.a.* 823, *AI, s.a.* 823, and *AFM, s.a.* 822.

chron, o Benncor bagha d'Oentrob' (It will be true, true, by the will of the High King of Kings, my bones shall be borne without harm, from Bangor of the fighting to Antrim). Similarly, another attack recorded by the annals precipitated the *translatio* of shrines inland. The 'orgain Becc-Ereann, 7 Dairinsi Caomháin' (plundering of Dairinis Caemhain and Beg Erin islands) is recorded by the *Annals of the Four Masters s.a.* 819. The *Vita Tripartita* sheds light on the precipitous circumstances of some translations in its account of the removal of the shrines of 'Erdit and Augustine from the lesser island' in Wexford Harbour to Sletty when the island was 'taken by the heathens' (Erdit 7 Agustin hisind insi as laigiu, 7 íarna gabail do gentib hi Sléibtiu a scrina atáat).[129]

Material Evidence

The material evidence verifies some of the written accounts. We have seen above that holes in tombs at Killabuonia and Bovevagh correspond to the *fenestella* or *cataracta* of more monumental continental tombs. The small size of these graves and the fact that the bones were placed in them rather than under the ground indicates that these holy bodies were moved here from their original resting places. These shrines were not long enough to fit an extended body and are most likely an indication of reburial. This points to the practice of *translatio* and associated veneration. Henry highlights the concordance of this ritual reburial with early Christian practice, as preserved in the lives of Cuthbert and some continental saints.[130] The usual *topos* involves an initial traditional burial underground followed by exhumation and placement in a grander, more monumental shrine, possibly elevated, and facilitating more large-scale veneration.

There is also early archaeological evidence for the translation of bodies at sites such as Illaunloughan, Clonmacnoise, and Colp, Co. Meath. The interior of the 'reliquary shrine' (essentially, underneath the slab shrine) at Illaunloughan contained two stone cists below layers of soil, shells, white quartz stones, and gravel.[131] Each was shaped like a miniature lintel cist grave and contained exhumed bones of an adult male. Similarly, a drystone cist, too short for a standard grave, was discovered within the shrine chapel at Clonmacnoise.[132]

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[129] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2261–62 (p. 117).

[130] Henry, 'Early Monasteries', p. 161. See Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, 42 (pp. 290–95).

[131] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 61.

[132] Manning, 'Some Early Masonry Churches at Clonmacnoise', p. 69.

Colp is a very interesting site dated to the fifth or sixth centuries, positioned at Inber Colpdi at the mouth of the River Boyne.[133] This location is recorded by Muirchú as the place where Patrick and his companions landed before celebrating the first Easter on the island.[134] The burials are located both within and without a penannular enclosure which, in turn, is contained within a very large outer enclosure ditch that has produced evidence for overseas trading in the form of B and E ware. The archaeologists hypothesize that this site represents an important familial settlement or cemetery, or perhaps even a trading site. Bone samples have now produced a date for a female that was the central burial within the penannular enclosure, placing it in the latter half of the sixth century. This suggests that the cemetery may have commenced at this time. A male burial which was the deepest excavated (also within the penannular enclosure) has produced a date in the sixth or seventh centuries. However, the most noteworthy burial is that of a disarticulated male in a box (B161), which has produced a fifth- or sixth-century date, and which was clearly translated to this location from another place.[135] Archaeological analysis has shown that this person died somewhere other than Colp, which poses the questions: who was this person? When was his disarticulated skeleton translated? And for what reason was this done?[136] Even without answers, these excavation results provide some remarkable archaeological evidence for the existence of *translatio* at an early date in Ireland and augment the historical record.

The analysis provided here shows that statements asserting a (unique) lack of interest in both corporeal relic-veneration and, accordingly, *translatio*, in early medieval Ireland oversimplify the complexity of the early Irish Church. Evidently, not only were corporeal relics a key feature of the cult of relics in Ireland, but there is also much more evidence for *translatio* than just vague allusions in Tírechán. Above all, the Irish material suggests a variation in practice and a Church that was anything but monolithic.

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[133] Gowen, 'Colp West: Early Christian Enclosure, Cemetery', p. 32 (no. 51); O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian Burial', p. 133. All the details discussed here can also be found under Colp West and Colp West 1 on the Mapping Death Online Database: <www.mappingdeathdb.ie> [accessed 19 February 2015].

[134] Muirchú, I, 14.13 (p. 84). See also Bieler's comments, *Patrician Texts*, p. 202.

[135] Male number B161. 1 sigma = cal AD 441–572; 2 sigma = cal AD 433–596.

[136] These questions are posed in the Colp West 1 entry on the Mapping Death Online Database.

Leachta, Sepulcri, and the Role of Relics in Church Consecration

The devotional activity surrounding the cult of relics, as indicated by hagiography, accounts of *translatio*, and the veneration of tombs, led to the increasing employment of relics in the operations and framework of the Church. This is particularly well attested in the fundamental function of relics in church consecration. This practice stemmed from a basic desire of early Christians to maintain an intimate relationship with the saints, even beyond death. As devotees sought proximity to the holy dead an innate connection was forged between relics and the altar, and the evolution of altar tombs in the earliest days of Christianity.

Altar Tombs

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Christian churches, which distinguishes them from contemporary secular structures, is the presence of an altar.[1] Deriving from the Latin *altare*, from *altus*, 'high, raised up', an altar in Christianity is an elevated structure on which the sacrifice of the Mass is offered, and the Eucharist is celebrated. As brought to light by Crook, previous researchers have emphasized the effect of liturgy on church design, while ignoring the comparably significant impact of relics.[2] However, the veneration of the dead was a key element in the development of the altar and the

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[1] See Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, chap. 6.

[2] Crook, *Architectural Setting*, p. 9.

celebration of the Eucharist. In ancient Rome, relatives often commemorated the birthdays of dead loved ones by holding banquets termed *refrigeria* at their tombs.[3] Converts to the new Christian religion continued this practice, eventually turning the tomb into an altar. Banquet motifs are found on both pagan and Christian tombs in Rome, dating to the third and fourth centuries. These funerary meal scenes are also painted on the walls of some of the *hypogea* in the catacombs.[4] The celebration of the Eucharist on the tombs of martyrs evidently derived from the practice of celebrating the anniversaries and other feasts in honour of those early martyrs who died for the faith. The custom was influenced by the message in Revelation 6. 9–10, which stresses the connection between the altar and the burial place of the martyrs, who are portrayed as calling to God from the altar. Pope Felix I (269–74) reputedly even decreed that Mass should be celebrated on the tombs of the martyrs.[5] With the official recognition of Christianity in the fourth century, and especially under the pontificate of Pope Damasus, basilicas and chapels were erected in Rome and elsewhere in honour of the most famous martyrs, and altars were often positioned over their tombs. Again, Prudentius is a valuable source. He describes the many enshrined tombs he saw in the city of Rome and refers specifically to the altar next to the tomb of Hippolytus: 'Talibus Hippolyti corpus mandatur opertis, propter ubi adposita est ara dicata deo' (Such is the place of concealment to which the body of Hippolytus was entrusted, where nearby there is an altar dedicated to God).[6]

This evolution of practice may explain the prevalence of the enigmatic *leachta* on early Irish sites. *Leachta* are open-air, altar-like, rectangular drystone constructions, which are commonly found in a number of island monasteries along the west of Ireland, including Illauntannig, Illaunloughan, and Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry,[7] High Island, Co. Galway, and Inishmurray, Co. Sligo.[8] Recent excavations of these structures on Illaunloughan and Inishmurray have resulted in reappraisals of the monument type. Archaeologists argue that some of the surviving *leachta* clearly acted as altars. However, the etymology of the term, originally *lecht*, deriving from Latin *lectus*, 'bed', implies an association

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[3] Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, p. 63.

[4] Jensen, 'Dining with the Dead', p. 111.

[5] Loomis, *The Book of the Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*, p. 33.

[6] Prudentius, 'Liber Peristephanon', ed. by Bergman, Hymn XI, ll. 169–70.

[7] Horn and others, *Skellig Michael*, pp. 42–45.

[8] White Marshall and Rourke, *High Island*, pp. 36–37.

with burial and can be translated as 'grave', 'memorial', or 'monument'.[9] Du Cange demonstrates that *lectus* in Latin texts can be used to denote a bier (*feretrum*) on which corpses are carried out for burial in a tumulus.[10] In a Christian sense *lectus* often signifies the resting place of a saint as in the *Life and Miracles of St Benedict*, the *Life of Willibrord*, and others.[11] Similarly, the equation of a saint's burial place with a bed is common in Irish sources. For example, the place name Labbamolaga (*leaba Molaige*) near Mitchelstown, Co. Cork preserves the tradition that St Molaga was buried there. Likewise, death notices of saints in the annals are often expressed as the '*dormitatio*' (falling asleep) of the individual.[12] In his *Vita Columbae* Adomnán compares the saint's death to a peaceful slumber:

> Quo tabernaculum corporis egreso facies rubens et mirum in modum angelica uisione exhilarita in tantum remansit, ut non quasi mortui sed dormientis uideretur uiuentis.

> When that had left the tabernacle of the body, his face continued to be ruddy, and in a wonderful degree gladdened by the vision of angels, so much that it seemed like the face not of a dead man, but of a living sleeper.[13]

Furthermore, Adomnán cements the link between relics and the altar by situating the saint's death at the altar within the church on Iona.[14] On sensing his imminent departure from this earth and hearing the midnight call to prayer, Columba rose from his bed and ran into the church and 'iuxta altare flexís in oratione genibus recumbit' (bowing his knees in prayer he sank down beside the altar).[15]

The earliest Irish reference to the term *lecht* confirms its meaning as a final resting place. The ninth-century glossary *Sanas Cormaic* describes it as a 'dead person's bed' (lecht .i. lige mhairb. ab eo quod est lectus).[16] In the Old Irish law

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[9] Vendryes, *De Hibernicis Vocabulis*, p. 150.

[10] Du Cange, *Glossarium*, IV, L 54.

[11] Du Cange, *Glossarium*, IV, L 54.

[12] See, for example, *AU*, *s.a.* 526, 'Dormitatio sancte Brigite'; *AU*, *s.a.* 535, 'Dormitatio Muchti discipuli Patricii'; *AU*, *s.a.* 679, 'Dormitatio Nectain Neir'.

[13] *VSC*, III, 23 (pp. 226–27).

[14] On the significance of this episode in relation to the possible existence of a relic of Columba's hand at the time when Adomnán was composing the *Life*, see Márkus, 'Diormit'.

[15] *VSC*, III, 23 (pp. 224–25).

[16] *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. by Meyer, p. 68. For dating, see Russell, 'Dúil Dromma Cetta'; Russell, 'The Sounds of Silence'.

tract on co-tenancy, *Bretha Comaithchesa*, a *leacht* is one of a list of stone mark-
ers, used to delineate property boundaries: 'Ailbla: crich incoisce ail adrada ɫ ail
annscuithe ɫ crann ɫ lig ɫ ail leachta' (A stone mark: a boundary which is signi-
fied by a rock of adoration, or an immovable rock, or a tree or flagstone, or the
rock of a *leacht*).[17] The closely related term *lecc* seems to refer to an altar stone
in the later *Vita Tripartita*,[18] but also, amongst other meanings, to a tomb-
stone.[19] Vendryes examined the distinction between the terms *fert* and *leacht*,
incorrectly equated by Edward Gwynn in his corrigenda to the volumes of *The
Metrical Dinshenchas*.[20] Vendryes explains that, while they both indeed refer to
graves, a *fert* refers to a mound of earth over a burial and a *leacht* refers to the
spot where the dead body lies. Consequently, there could conceivably be a *fert*
over a *leacht* — the point disputed by Gwynn.[21]

   The etymology and early uses of the term *leacht*, therefore, indicate a bur-
ial place. When local tradition associates this word with a place we should, at
first, expect that corporeal relics are present. Indeed, the association of *leachta*
with corporeal relics is confirmed by excavations in Relickoran, Inishmurray
where two of these structures were built over burials that provided two sigma
calibrated dates of AD 711–982 and AD 893–1148.[22] Human bones were
also uncovered during the renovation of the outer wall of the *leacht* in the
Skellig Michael monastery.[23] Furthermore, examples of two probable *leachta*
at Ronaldsway in the Isle of Man contained bodies.[24] In certain cases archae-
ologists have ruled out the presence of bodily remains within certain *leachta*.
However, they have not always excavated, or been able to excavate, the ground
beneath the structure. This is the case with the *leacht* within the small church on
Skellig Michael. It is possible that further investigation could, perhaps, reveal
remains underneath the *leacht*. However, it must be acknowledged that such
excavations are not always possible, especially given the logistical and conserva-
tion restrictions at a site such as Skellig Michael.

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[17] *CIH*, I, 201.17–18.

[18] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 781–83 (p. 47).

[19] *DIL*, 2012 L 67.

[20] Vendryes, *De Hibernicis Vocabulis*, p. 154.

[21] *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. by Gwynn, V, corrigenda 36, 2 (p. 128).

[22] O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*, p. 291.

[23] Horn and others, *Skellig Michael*, p. 45.

[24] Laing, *Archaeology of Celtic Britain and Ireland*, p. 289.

Excavations of the *leacht* at Trahanareer, Inishmurray, revealed that it was built on top of a rectangle of paving, at the centre of which was a posthole surrounded by packing stones. O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin noted that

> the central position of the post-hole leaves no doubt that the *leacht* was erected immediately after the post it had held was removed, because the exact position of the post would have been forgotten if there had been a substantial hiatus between the two monuments.[25]

They interpret the posthole as evidence for a 'table altar' mounted on a single wooden prop. They conclude that all the *leachta* on Inishmurray were most likely to have been used as altars, and that 'a plurality of altars with different dedications was regarded as a basic requirement for important ecclesiastical establishments'.[26] The excavation of another *leacht* within an Insular sphere of influence uncovered similar features. Like Illaunloughan, the *leacht* at Baliscate, Isle of Mull, was covered with white quartz pebbles, perhaps left as offerings.[27] At Baliscate it was clear that the water-worn pebbles, not all of them white quartz, had been left on top of the *leacht* and had been later incorporated into the overlying rubble layer as the structure collapsed or was demolished. A head-stone of Iona marble, indicating contacts with Columba's community, marked the head end of one the early inhumation graves on the site.

There are serious issues concerning the purpose of the structures termed *leachta*, and the use of the word itself. Archaeologists Jenny White Marshall and Clare Walsh raise these problems in their study of Illaunloughan.[28] However, as J. W. Hunwicke rightly emphasized in a letter in *Archaeology Ireland* in the summer of 2006, progress is unlikely to be made on this issue unless the question of definition is addressed.[29] While White Marshall and Walsh acknowledge that the etymology of the term means 'grave', implying that *leachta* are monuments marking a significant interment, they claim that in reality interred remains are not easily distinguishable at many of these excavated structures.[30] Accordingly, they refer to some *leachta* as altars. However, reference to *leachta* as altars is misleading, as the surface of many of these structures is wholly unsuitable for

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[25] O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*, p. 236.

[26] O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*, p. 323.

[27] *Baliscate Chapel, Isle of Mull*, Wessex Archaeology.

[28] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, pp. 49–50.

[29] Hunwicke, '*Leachta*', p. 49.

[30] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, pp. 49–50.

such a task. Hunwicke argues that *leachta* were designed for corpses to rest on preceding burial. This definition is possibly also too narrow and I would argue that *leachta*, in a general sense, may have fulfilled all of the aforementioned functions over time.[31] The continental altar tombs must always be kept in mind as the original paradigm. Nevertheless, Hunwicke raises an important issue — namely that we may be using this term incorrectly. One cannot argue that the etymology of the word is wrong. The problem lies within the use of the term. The following questions posed by Charles Thomas in 1971, therefore, still provide much food for thought today:

> Do we then assume that leachta began as special graves whose superstructures came to be treated as open-air altars, or merely as open-air altars, in themselves copying other and older forms which did stand directly above graves? Are the leachta in any sense parallel to the Mediterranean altar-graves?[32]

Only a small number of *leachta* have been excavated. However, many have failed to produce conclusive dating evidence. The excavations of the large oratory on Skellig Michael and at Illaunloughan have both demonstrated that these buildings were structurally integrated into early medieval *leachta*. Similarly, excavation on the small oratory terrace on Skellig Michael identified a possible rectangular drystone-built *leacht*, which was coeval with the surrounding paving, revetment walls, and oratory.[33] The *leacht* at Illaunloughan was contemporary with the monastery as its construction 'predates the stone oratory but possibly not by a significant period'.[34] Some of the excavated *leachta* were definitely located on top of burials but it is unclear whether they were built specifically to mark the location of a particular burial. It has, however, been suggested by White Marshall and Walsh that the *leacht* on Illaunloughan may have been used as an open-air altar with a potential liturgical purpose, which marked 'the place of the earliest oratory and honoured the earliest monks buried around the oratory'.[35] Even though it incorporated some human bone, the excavators argue that the *leacht* was not a reliquary from the evidence of the plinth of the complex reliquary shrine on the island: 'Unlike the distinctive treatment accorded to the bones in the gable shrine, the bones in the *leacht* were not placed inside

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[31] See also comments in Horn and others, *Skellig Michael*, p. 42.

[32] Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, p. 175.

[33] Horn and others, *Skellig Michael*, pp. 40–45.

[34] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 156.

[35] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 53.

small paved cists'.[36] However, given the continental comparisons, combined with some of the archaeological evidence in Ireland and the etymology of the term, the dismissal of the evidence of bone fragments within the monument is perhaps too hasty. Cormac Bourke proposes that there existed two kinds of *leacht* on Illaunloughan.[37] One was freestanding, serving a reliquary function, and was modified when the slab shrine was built on top. The other adjoined the church and may have been an altar. He suggests that it may have been where the faithful placed their gifts, as its position on the northern side of the church is appropriate for perishable goods. Again, I would contend that the original purpose of structures termed *leachta* was as altar-tombs — a model imported from the Continent. Examples which have been definitively proven to have no association with corporeal remains perhaps mark a later stage in the evolution of this monument in Ireland.

Relics within the Altar

Relics were distributed from Rome to bind churches to it and to solidify certain agreements and edicts. These relics were also used for church consecration. In the development of the early Church relics became an integral part of church consecration, as popularized by Ambrose in the fourth century.[38] He succinctly expressed the relationship between relics *on* and *within* the altar, and consequently between relics and the Eucharist: 'He who suffered for all shall be upon the altar, those redeemed by His passion beneath it'.[39] The martyr's cult thus became rooted in the community's Eucharistic worship. Against this background a similar 'grave space' or *sepulcrum* was provided in other churches, in which relics were placed. Paulinus of Nola regarded relics as occupying so central a place within the church building that he qualified them as 'the holy of holiest sanctified by the altar'.[40]

Around the turn of the fifth century the letters of Avitus of Vienne testify to the use of relics in the dedication and consecration of churches in Gaul.[41] That this practice had become standard by the fifth century is evident in the writings

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[36] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 52.

[37] Bourke, 'Review of Illaunloughan', pp. 144–46.

[38] See above, chap. 1.

[39] Ambrose, *Epistles*, trans. by Beyenka, Epistle 22, 13.

[40] Paulinus, *Epistulae*, ed. by de Hartel, Epistle 32, 11 (pp. 286–87).

[41] Wood, 'Audience of Architecture', pp. 74–79.

of pseudo-Maximus, who specifically noted that there once was a time when holy fathers consecrated their altars to saints successfully, *despite* being unable to find relics.[42] Ian Wood demonstrates that the importance of the use of relics in church consecration lay in the intercessory and protective abilities of the saints, especially to a sub-Roman population deprived of the protection of the Roman army and vulnerable to 'barbarian' expansion.[43] Avitus eloquently summarized this mindset in relation to one Gallic city, describing it as protected more by its basilicas than by its garrisons.[44] The growing demand for relics, especially for their role in the dedication of churches through deposition in the principal altar, became more widespread. The pressure on the popes to share Rome's riches increased. However, Rome was reluctant to disseminate relics. Gregory the Great, like popes before and after him, distributed relics such as *brandea*, *sanctuaria*, and filings from the chains of St Paul.[45] In the history of church consecration these minute objects came to be regarded as almost as precious as the body of the saint itself. For example, Avitus successfully petitioned the pope for such filings on behalf of the Burgundian prince Sigismund, even though local corporeal relics were available.[46] Similarly, Stephen of Ripon's eighth-century *Life of St Wilfrid* records that the Anglo-Saxon bishop procured many relics during visits to Rome, and even received the relics of St Andrew (presumably *brandea*) from the pope and used them in the dedication of his monastic foundation at Hexham.[47] Herrmann-Mascard provides a thorough examination of the many instances of altar relic consecration on the Continent.[48]

Ultimately, therefore, relics and the Eucharist became intrinsically linked. Godefridus Snoek has charted the adoration of the Host from early Christianity until the late medieval period, demonstrating that this practice was closely associated with the veneration of the relics of the saints.[49] In order to fully appreciate the role of both relics and the Eucharist in medieval society we must cease regarding these items as always distinct. Indeed, an exposition of the connec-

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[42] Maximus (pseudo-Maximus), ed. by Migne, Appendix 30 (cols 853–54).

[43] Wood, 'Audience of Architecture', p. 78.

[44] Avitus, *Homiliae*, ed. by Peiper, Homily 24, ll. 6–7 (p. 144).

[45] See McCulloh, 'Cult of Relics in Pope Gregory the Great', pp. 149–50.

[46] Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, ed. by Peiper, Epistle 29 (p. 59).

[47] *Vita Wilfridi*, ed. by Krusch and Levison, esp. 5 (pp. 198–99).

[48] Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*, pp. 159–61. For the use of relics in church consecration in general, see pp. 162–65.

[49] Snoek, *Medieval Piety*.

tion between relics and the Host is provided in an Irish context by the Old Irish *Tract on the Mass* contained within the Stowe Missal.[50] The 'parallel applications in concrete use' of relics and the Host, a phrase coined by Snoek, included the daily use against dangers and two ecclesiastical forms: 'prayer of supplication' and the 'cementing in an altar stone'.[51] From the eighth to the thirteenth centuries this practice, carried out during the consecration of an altar, consisted of cementing three particles of a consecrated Host — together with, or instead of, relics — in the altar stone or *sepulcrum*.[52]

There is also evidence for this practice in early Christian Ireland. An exciting find by William Wakeman in 1844 potentially provides concrete material evidence of a *sepulcrum*. Wakeman and a companion by chance discovered a cavity in the altar within Teach Molaise on Inishmurray, which he described as 'a cist-like hollow within the centre of the altar [...] no doubt, intended as a secret receptacle for some very sacred relic. We found within it a piece of decayed yew'.[53] The description of this recess within the altar was very similar to the church consecration rites described above. The comparison is bolstered by the presence of the decayed yew, which may have formed part of the original relics. Regrettably, this 'cist' or altar hollow was not examined in the extensive excavations begun on Inishmurray in 1998.[54] Further analysis could, conceivably, contribute greatly to the study of the cult of relics in Ireland, and could provide a deeper understanding of the church consecration rite and its parallels with practice on the Continent.

Nevertheless, excavations have been undertaken on other sites within the Insular milieu, which have yielded conclusive results. In 1952 and 1954 excavations of St Ninian's Chapel on Bute, off the coast of Scotland, possibly founded in the sixth or seventh centuries, revealed an altar of rough masonry faced with slabs, with a *fossa* or cavity for relics at the south end.[55] Since the excavations in the 1950s the site has deteriorated to the extent that by late 1976 the altar, along with other material, was unfortunately no longer visible.[56] Thomas's

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[50] *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 255.

[51] Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, pp. 3–4 and chaps 5–6.

[52] Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, p. 65.

[53] Wakeman, *A Survey of Inismurray*, p. 42.

[54] O'Sullivan and Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray*, p. 77.

[55] Aitken, 'Excavations of a Chapel at St. Ninian's Point'.

[56] 'Bute, St. Ninian's Chapel', website of The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk> [accessed 11 February 2013].

excavations of the eighth-century stone chapel on Ardwall Isle, Scotland, also revealed a cavity within the altar.[57] In this instance the cavity was not as easily accessible as the other examples but it did produce bone fragments from five skeletons dating to different periods. This suggests that these remains were burials from an earlier phase of activity on the site and that they were enshrined within the new altar when the stone chapel was built.[58]

The documentary evidence also supports the thesis that relics were placed within altars as part of the consecration rite in Ireland along continental lines. The practice is testified by a section in the *Hibernensis*, where it is claimed that the blood of a martyr consecrates a site, and furthermore, that the soul of the martyr is situated under the altar. The full chapter is as follows:

> a. Sinodus: Sanguis martyrum consecrat locum, non locus sanguinem. Si aliquis dixerit: mea est ecclesia, dices ei, quod in Cantico legitur: Una est columba mea, et unus est dilectus meus. Et dices illi: aptum est, filium occidi in sinu matris et nutricis suae, tamen scias, nutricem tantum pollutam, et pro hac pollutione consecratur, filium vero mortuum esse. b. Sinodus: Ovius episcopus dicit: Reliquias nemo potest polluere, quorum animae visione Dei satiatae mundialia oblivioni tradunt; animae vero martyrum sub ara Dei clamant dicentes: Vindica sanguinem nostrum et reliqua.[59]

> a. A Synod: the blood of martyrs consecrates the place, not the place the blood. If anyone said: this is my church, say to him that in the Canticle we read: My dove is one and my beloved is one. And you will say to him: It is fitting for a son to be killed in the bosom of the one who mothered and nursed him, yet know that only the one who nursed is polluted, and for this pollution she is consecrated, however the son is dead. b. A Synod: Bishop Ovius says: No-one can pollute the relics of those, whose souls nourished with the vision of God forget worldly things. Truly the souls of the martyrs cry out under the altar of God saying: Avenge our blood, etc.

Similarly, Cogitosus describes how the refurbishment of the basilica in Kildare included the placing of the shrines of Brigit and Conláed on either side of the altar.[60] Indeed, in the earliest lives of Brigit miracles associated with altars are prominent. According to Cogitosus, the base of the altar, at which Brigit took her vows in the presence of Bishop Mac Caille, to this day produces miracles, on account of the fact that Brigit touched it during the ceremony:

[57] Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 179–81.

[58] Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, p. 181.

[59] *Hibernensis*, 44.19 (pp. 178–79).

[60] *VCog*, 32 (p. 141).

Quae coram Deo et Episcopo ac altari genua humiliter flectens, et suam virginalem coronam Deo omnipotenti offerens, fundamentum ligneum, quo altare fulciebatur, manu tetigit: quod lignum in commemorationem pristinae virtutis usque ad praesens tempus viride, ac si non esset excisum et decorticatum, sed in radicibus fixum, virescit, et usque hodie languores et morbos de omnibus expellit fidelibus.

Kneeling humbly before God and the bishop as well as before the altar and offering her virginal crown to almighty God, she touched with her hand the wooden base on which the altar rested. And to commemorate her unsullied virtue, this wood flourishes fresh and green to the present day as if it had not been cut down and stripped of its bark but was attached to its roots. And to this day it rids all the faithful of afflictions and diseases.[61]

This episode is also noteworthy as it is a rare early reference to post mortem miracles performed by relics — in this case an associative relic rather than a corporeal one.[62] *Bethu Brigte* elaborates that the beam turned from ash to the more durable and biblically significant acacia (*sethim*), which miraculously survived fire on a number of occasions.[63] Acacia wood is designated 'incorruptible wood' in the Septuagint and it represents one of the first references to plants in the Bible, being used for the table of the loaves of proposition and the altar of holocausts. Most significantly, God instructed Moses to use acacia wood to build the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant.[64]

   An interesting anecdote in the *Vita Prima* indicates that Brigit may have had an interest in the liturgy of the Church at a very young age, because the child Brigit is essentially described as 'playing Mass'. Brigit explains to one of her nuns that when she was a little girl she 'made a stone altar as a child's game and the angel came and perforated the stone at the four corners and put four wooden legs under it' (Item cum ego parva puella essem, feci altare lapideum ludo puellari, venitque Angelus Domini, et perforavit lapidem in quattuor anulis, et subposuit quatuor pedes ligneos).[65] As this must have been an odd game for a child in early Irish society to play, regardless of her sanctity, the inclusion

[61] *VCog*, 5 (p. 136); trans. by Connolly and Picard, 2.2–3 (p. 14). *Vita Prima*, 16 (p. 121) recounts the same story, except in this version Brigit receives the veil from Bishop Mel.

[62] The fact that the altar base later became a famous relic is testified by a gloss in *Félire*, pp. 66–67, which records that seven churches were burnt with that 'foot' in them but it survived.

[63] *Bethu Brigte*, ed. by Ó hAodha, 18 (p. 24).

[64] Exodus 25. 9–10, 15.

[65] *Vita Prima*, 87 (p. 131); trans. by Connolly, 87.11 (p. 40).

of the altar story is of particular significance.[66] The exalted position of altars in Irish sources is not surprising given how integral they are to the celebration of the Eucharist, which is central to Christian theology. Altars feature in a variety of different contexts in early Ireland. The description of the church layout in the *Hisperica Famina* highlights the prominent position of the altar in the centre of the church, in its trademark flowery and mischievous style: 'Ageam copulat in gremio aram, cui collecti cerimonicant uates missam' (it has a holy altar in the centre, on which the assembled priests celebrate the Mass).[67] The language of the poem is notably difficult to decipher. However, Herren's prosaic translation obscures the carnal overtones of the phrase 'copulat in gremio aram' which indicate that the altar is nestled within the womb or bosom of the church. Tírechán mentions an 'altare mirabile lapideum' (marvellous stone altar) on the mountain in the territory of the Uí Ailella, across the River Shannon, near where he ordained holy Ailbe.[68] The implication here could be that Patrick was in the area before, or that this altar was part of an earlier foundation. The *Vita Tripartita* adds that there were four chalices of glass at the four corners of the altar.[69] Furthermore, Adomnán clearly appreciated that relics were customarily associated with altars. In order to seek the intercession of the saint to change contrary winds to favourable ones, Columba's vestments and book were placed on the altar:

> Beati uiri uestimenta et libros inito consilio, super altare cum salmís et ieiunatione et eius nominis inuocatione possuimus, ut a domino uentorum prosperitatem nobís profuturam inpetraret.

> We adopted the plan of laying garments and books of the blessed man upon the altar, with psalms and fasting, and the invocation of his name; in order that he might obtain from the Lord prosperous winds in our favour.[70]

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[66] For a discussion of the exact form these altars may have taken, see Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology*, pp. 176–77; Hamlin, 'The Study of Early Irish Churches', p. 119.

[67] Herren, *The Hisperica Famina*, p. 108. See Ó Carragáin, 'The Architectural Setting of the Mass', for a recent exploration of the position of the altar in early Irish churches.

[68] Tírechán, 19.5 (p. 138).

[69] *Bethu Phátraic*, l. 1043 (p. 57).

[70] *VSC*, ii, 45 (p. 174).

Relics and Church Consecration in Ireland

The Irish material indicates that relics were an essential requirement in the foundation of churches in early Ireland. Evidence to support this can be found in a myriad of sources. For example, the *Hibernensis* provides extensive sanctions to conserve the purity of places consecrated by saints' relics.[71] Furthermore, when Bishop Colmán and his Irish monks left Lindisfarne after their defeat at the Synod of Whitby, they brought with them relics and founded a church on Inishbofin: 'Nauigatio Columbani episcopi cum reliquis sanctorum ad Insolam Uaccae Albae, in qua fundauit aeclesiam' (The voyage of Bishop Colmán, with the relics of the saints, to Inis Bó Finne, where he founded a church).[72] The implication is clearly that the relics and the foundation of the church were intimately connected. According to the mid-ninth century *Virtutes Fursei*,[73] at his departure from Louth in 626 Fursa brought with him to Francia, not only relics (*pignora*) of Patrick, but also those of local patron saints Beoán and Meldán, amongst others: 'Patricii, Beoani, Meldani et ceterorum quos secum detulit'.[74] With these relics Fursa built a church in thirty days, in honour of the twelve apostles.[75]

Similarly, *Bretha Nemed Toísech* states that the qualifications of a good church included both the tomb of a righteous man, presumably the founding saint, *and* the relics of saints:

> Cair: cis n-é dagfolad sóertho ecalso? Ní hansae: martarlaic fíréoin, reilgi nóeb, scriptuir déodae, airchinnech etail [...] Ní biat acht téora selba fuiri .i. selb Dé 7 selb nóebmartarlaic asa chongbál, selb airchinnig cráibthig comalnathar ríagla soiscélai 7 screpto.

> What are the good qualifications ennobling a church? It is not difficult: the shrine of a righteous man, the relics of saints, divine scripture, a sinless superior [...] There are only three possessions (claims) (imposed) on it, that is possession by God, possession by the holy shrine of him whose foundation it is, possession by a devout superior who fulfils the rules of the gospel and scripture.[76]

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[71] *Hibernensis*, 44.6–9 (pp. 176–77).

[72] *AU*, *s.a.* 668. See also Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, IV, 4 (pp. 346–48).

[73] Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 104.

[74] *Virtutes Fursei*, ed. by Krusch, 19 (p. 447); Picard, 'Le culte des reliques', p. 49.

[75] *Virtutes Fursei*, ed. by Krusch, 19 (p. 447).

[76] *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, ed. by Breatnach, 3 (pp. 8–9, 11).

As pointed out above, the term *martarlaic* here implies a static tomb type monument.[77] This example, enshrined in early Irish law, reflects the reality in Ireland that *both* the remains of the local saint or founder *and* the relics of other saints were present on church sites. *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, therefore, sheds light on the Irish archaeological evidence, which indicates that the tomb of the founder saint was often located outside the principal church. Nevertheless, the text highlights that different relics were also present. These were most likely *brandea* and *sanctuaria* distributed from Rome (and major Irish churches, such as Armagh), and presumably these were the relics placed within the church as part of the consecration rite.

In her study of Rome under Pope Paschal I Caroline Goodson underlines the distinction between 'Roman corporeal relics preserved *in situ*, contact relics given as gifts by the popes, and relics of non-Roman saints accepted and venerated in Roman churches'.[78] She shows that the relics deposited in altars were most likely contact relics. An inscription in the church of Sant' Angelo in Rome, which was founded in 755 or 770, indicates that the altar held contact relics, oils, or *brandea*. The system in Rome, therefore, seems to have been that Roman saints' bodies were venerated at the catacombs or extramural churches, whereas apostolic and other foreign relics and contact relics were held in the altars of urban churches.[79] Likewise, contact relics were used for church consecration in Ireland and are particularly prominent in the Patrician material. Tírechán states that Patrick ordained his disciple Sachellus in Rome and then wrote for him a book of the Psalms: 'et ordinauit illum in urbe Roma et dedit nomen nouum Sachellum; et scripsit illi librum psalmorum, quem uidi' (and he ordained him in the city of Rome and gave him the name Sachellus; and he wrote for him a book of the Psalms, which I have seen).[80] As we saw above, he also 'received from him a portion of the relics of Peter and Paul, Stephen and Lawrence, which are in Armagh' (Et portauit ab illo partem de reliquís Petri et Pauli, Laurentii et Stefani quae sunt in Machi).[81] While these relics lent authority to Sachellus and bound him to Patrick, they would also have been required by Sachellus in order to found a church. Following on from the discussion regarding Sachellus's *Basilica Sanctorum* in Chapter 2 above, it is likely

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[77] Above, chap. 2. For the term *martar*, see Appendix.

[78] Goodson, *Rome of Pope Paschal I*, pp. 204–08 (p. 207).

[79] Goodson, *Rome of Pope Paschal I*, p. 208.

[80] Tírechán, ɪɪ, 3.5 (pp. 122–23).

[81] Tírechán, ɪɪ, 3.5 (pp. 122–23).

that the placement of these relics was a deliberate appropriation on behalf of Armagh, as the church most likely held earlier relics. This may have been part of a policy to conceal old or obscure cults, analogous to Augustine's suppression of the cult of Sixtus in England.[82]

Tírechán was clearly concerned with establishing what churches 'belonged' to Patrick and, therefore, Armagh. He creates an image of an Irish countryside interspersed with relics, bestowed by Patrick and his disciples on the churches they founded. Not only did these relics bind the communities to Armagh but also, through the consecration of churches and altars with them, they firmly rooted the Christian Church into the physical landscape. Indeed, the constant references to Tírechán in the present work highlight his preoccupation with relics. This is arguably due to the strategic function of saintly remains in authenticating claims and ascertaining the jurisdiction of churches. In another episode Tírechán recounts how Patrick ordained Olcán and granted him Roman relics in Dún Sobairche (Dunseverick, Co. Antrim):

> In Duin Sebuirgi sedit supra petram, quae petra Patricii usque nunc, et ordinauit ibi Olcanum sanctum episcopum, quem nutriuit Patricius et dedit illi partem de reliquiis Petri et Pauli et aliorum, et uelum quod custodiuit reliquias.

> In Dún Sobairche he sat on a rock which is called Patrick's Rock until now, and there he consecrated holy Olcanus a bishop, whom Patrick had fostered, and he gave him a portion of the relics of Peter and Paul and others and a veil to protect the relics.[83]

Given the fact that Tírechán's narrative is dominated by laconic references to baptisms, ordinations, and consecrations, I would suggest that perhaps the cases in which we are given more details could represent paradigms of what occurred at each site. Regardless, the churches of Sachellus and Olcán were clearly of particular importance in Tírechán's landscape.

A note attributed to Tírechán makes a significant reference to the paraphernalia that Patrick needed in order to succeed in his missionary expedition across the Shannon. The necessary items were 'quinquaginta clocos, quinquaginta patinos, quinquaginta calices, altaria, libros legis, aeuanguelii libros' (fifty bells, fifty patens, fifty chalices, altar-stones, books of the law, books of the Gospels).[84] The accompanying statement that 'reliquit illos in locis nouis' (he

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[82] Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 151.

[83] Tírechán, 48.3 (pp. 160–61).

[84] Tírechán, ii, 1 (pp. 122–23).

left them in the new places) is significant in that it may confirm their impor-
tant role in the consecration of a church. *Altaria* here are clearly represented
as portable objects. Given the discussion above they could possibly have been
portable altar-stones containing relics which would be placed in a recess within
a wooden altar, acting as a *sepulcrum*. The lack of elaboration or specification
by Tírechán may indicate that the precise meaning of the term in this context
was readily intelligible to his audience. Elsewhere, Tírechán depicts Patrick
granting a stone altar (or an altar-stone?) to a church he founded in Caput Airt
(Kinard, Co. Westmeath): 'Et alteram aeclessiam in Capite Airt in regionibus
Roide, in qua possuit altare lapideum'.[85] However, Tírechán also explains that
Bishop Assicus, a coppersmith, manufactured altars for Patrick, along with
square casks for patens, three of which Tírechán has seen himself:

> Asicus sanctus episcopus faber aereus erat Patricio et faciebat altaria <et> biblio-
> thicas qua<drata>s faciebat in patinos sancti nostri pro honore Patricii episcopi, et
> de illis tres patinos quadratos uidi

> Assicus the holy bishop was a coppersmith (in the service) of Patrick, and he made
> altar-plates and square casks for the patens of our saint in honour of Bishop Patrick,
> and three of these square patens I have seen.[86]

This would suggest that the altars were made of copper or some other metal,
which indeed would make them quite portable. An Anglo-Saxon portable altar
found on the body of St Cuthbert in 1827 may provide an instructive model.
This small wooden altar has a seventh-century inscription and is encased in
metal plates dating to the eighth century.[87] As Ralegh Radford points out, by
the sixth century the standard practice of the Church was to construct altars
out of stone.[88] However, in Anglo-Saxon England wooden altars survived
until a relatively late date. For example, a wooden altar was found in the tomb
of St Acca, bishop of Hexham, who died *c.* 740.

The later Latin lives of Patrick claim that Palladius founded a church in Cell
Fine in Leinster and left certain items there, which he had received from St
Celestine:

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[85] Tírechán, 16.5 (p. 136).

[86] Tírechán, 22.1 (pp. 140–41).

[87] Radford, 'Portable Altar', pp. 326–27. For a detailed description of the inscription and
iconography of this artefact, see Okasha and O'Reilly, 'An Anglo-Saxon Portable Altar'.

[88] Radford, 'Portable Altar', p. 329.

> Unam quae dicitur Cellfine, in qua usque hodie libri sui, quos a sancto Caelestino accepit, et capsa reliquiarum beati Petri et Pauli et aliorum sanctorum cum magna ueneratione habentur, et tabulae in quibus scribere solebat.

> One which is called Cellfine, in which are held until today with great veneration his books which he received from Saint Celestinus, and a box of relics of the blessed Peter and Paul and other saints, and the tablets on which he used to write.[89]

These items would have been left in Cell Fine for the foundation and consecration of the church. The relics of Peter and Paul, or even a portion of the same, may have been placed within the church, presumably in or on the altar, as part of the consecration rite. The objects are the focus of great veneration in the author's time.[90] The corresponding passage in the *Vita Tripartita* uses the word *comrar* for the box containing these relics.[91] This term can denote a chest, casket, or shrine in the early texts and is glossed *capsa* in the St Gall glosses on Priscian.[92] Later, *comrar* explicitly refers to a coffin.[93] The *comrar* containing the relics, therefore, can perhaps be equated with the item termed a *meinistir* used elsewhere in the text. Following what now seems to be a familiar formula, Patrick left certain items behind him as he baptized and ordained converts and founded churches on his missionary journey. After baptizing the youth Mocháe Patrick bestowed him with a Gospel, a *meinistir*, and a staff:

> Ro pritchai Pátraic dó, 7 ro mbaitsi 7 ro mberr, 7 doratt soiscela 7 menistir dó. Et doratt dó dano, fecht aile bachaill tucad doib o Día.[94]

> Patrick preached to him and baptized him, and tonsured him, and gave him a Gospel and a *meinistir*. And he also gave him, at another time, a crosier that had been given to him from God.

Mocháe seemingly founded the island monastery of Nendrum on Strangford Lough, Co. Down where the *bachall* left by Patrick became known as 'Etech Mó Cháe Nóendroma'.[95] Furthermore, the *Vita Tripartita* asserts that this

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[89] *Vita Secunda*, ed. by Bieler, 24 (p. 76); 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick', trans. by Francis and Byrne, pp. 36–37. Cf. *Vita Quarta*, ed. by Bieler, 28 (pp. 76–77).

[90] *Vita Secunda*, 24, *Vita Quarta*, 28, ed. by Bieler, pp. 76–77.

[91] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 295–96 (p. 19).

[92] *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 90, 135.

[93] *DIL*, 2012 C 408.

[94] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 422–24 (pp. 25–26). Cf. *Vita Secunda*, 32.

[95] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 425–26 (p. 26).

gift incurred certain obligations and loyalty as we are informed that Mocháe pledged a pig to Patrick every year and that his community continues to fulfil this promise: 'Et dorairgert Mo Cháe mucc bér[r]tha cecha bliadnae do Pátraic, 7 is ed ón at[o]berar fos' (And Mocháe promised a shaven pig every year to Patrick; and this is still offered).[96] This tribute owed to Patrick's Church was possibly purely symbolic, a form of peppercorn rent.[97] Excavations at Nendrum have revealed the wealth and prosperity of the monastery in the early monastic period.[98] The remains of two tide mills were discovered, one dating to approximately the ninth or tenth centuries and the other dating to 619–21, ascertained from dendrochronology.[99] This was quite a remarkable find as it is, therefore, the earliest recovered tide mill in the world. The income generated from the mill would have been substantial. The earliest datable historical evidence for Nendrum is the *Annals of Ulster* obit of Crídán of Nendrum *s.a.* 639. Both the material and documentary sources thus suggest the community was founded in the early seventh century.[100]

Another example of a *meinistir* is found in the *Additamenta*, which are largely concerned with the rights or claims of Armagh. In this document Patrick is described as giving his disciple Fiacc, the first bishop to be consecrated in Leinster, a number of items with which to found a church. These included a *meinistir*: '7 dubbert Pátraicc cumtach du Fíacc, idon clocc 7 menstir 7 bachall 7 poolire' (And Patrick gave to Fíacc a case, that is, a bell and a reliquary and a crosier and tablets).[101] Clearly, a *meinistir* was viewed as a necessary element when establishing churches. It would seem likely that a *meinistir* was indeed a reliquary, or perhaps a portable altar type artefact. The word comes from the Latin *ministerium* — a container carrying Eucharistic vessels and/or the Host. It has been variously translated as reliquary or credence-table, which would have been a small table or tray in the sanctuary of a church for carrying Eucharistic vessels. In the *Additamenta* the *meinistir* is contained, along with the other items, within a *cumtach*, 'a cover, case, or shrine', which indicates that it was a small object.[102]

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[96] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 426–27 (p. 26).

[97] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 27–28.

[98] See McErlean and Crothers, *Harnessing the Tides*.

[99] McErlean and Crothers, *Harnessing the Tides*, pp. 68–76.

[100] McErlean and Crothers, *Harnessing the Tides*, p. 306.

[101] *Additamenta*, ed. by Bieler, 13 (5) (p. 176).

[102] *DIL*, 2012 C 626.

It seems unlikely in this context that the *meinistir* itself contained larger items such as a chalice or patens.

This can be teased out further. Though we have few references in our period we are in fact given a detailed description of a *meinistir* in the *Vita Tripartita*. Like the example above, this episode concerns Patrick bequeathing articles to a disciple, with which he could found his own church. The saint left a number of items and relics with Muinis in Forgnaide, including a crosier, a relic (*mind*) described as a copy of the case of the Book of John, another *mind* termed the *Donaide Matha*, which possibly contained relics of the martyrs, and also his *deirgdeirc* or *meinistir*:

> Foraccaib Patraic hi Forgnaidi 7 foraccaib a deirgdeirc leis .i. meinistir no bith fóa coim fadesin: dochrethumu doronat[h] 7 buindi óir fuirri thos, 7 foraccaib a bachaill ut praediximus, 7 foraccaib mind dorigne cona laim feissin, Donaidi Matha a ainm, 7 doronad cross cruanmoithni fair 7 ceithri ardda cruanmoithni; 7 foráccaib laiss mind ali .i. cosmailius chometa libair Iohain nád mór hi fail martrai Poil 7 Petair 7 alaili 7 biid do grés ar beinn inna scríne.[103]

> Patrick left (him) in Forgnaide, and left his *Derg-derc* with him, that is, a *meinistir* which was his own: made of bronze/brass, and there was a gold pipe on the lid, and he left his staff as we said before, and he left a relic which he made with his own hand, named *Donaide Matha*; and a red enamel [?] cross was made upon it and four red enamel [?] points and he left with him another relic, namely a copy of the case of the book of John, along with the relics of Paul and Peter and others, and it is always on the point of the shrine.

Again, it is clear that these objects were necessary for the establishment and running of a church. Staffs and books were so often closely associated with church leaders that they became part of the official *insignia* of their churches.[104] The language confirms this association as the book cover (or guard) and the *Donaide Matha* are referred to as *minna*, which were equated to *insignia* in the Irish sources.[105] The *Hibernensis* acknowledges this veneration of books in a section commemorating the transmigration of a number of martyrs' relics, stating that 'Liber Matthei manu sua scriptus cum reliquiis suis translatus est' (the Book of Matthew written with his own hand was translated with his relics).[106]

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[103] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 938–46 (p. 53).

[104] See chap. 5 below.

[105] See Appendix.

[106] *Hibernensis*, 49.5 (p. 205).

The *Vita Tripartita* passage clearly defines a *meinistir* as a man-made, metal object. This is corroborated by a verse near the end of *Vita Tripartita* that praises 'Na cerdae oc dénum na mmías 7 na menistreach 7 na caileach n-altóra .i. Tassach 7 Essu 7 Bitiu' (the artisans Tassach, Essu, and Bitiu, who make patens and altar-chalices and *meinistri*).[107] This implies that a *meinistir* was part of the toolbox of foundation equipment and Eucharistic vessels owned by a cleric. Later uses of *meinistir* confirm this hypothesis and also indicate that the item was a portable reliquary. In the later *Life of Máedóc of Ferns* the saint bequeaths to Drumlane his precious *meinistir* (the *Breac Maedhóg*) which contained an impressive number of relics that travelled with him everywhere: 'na biodh ar aistter i ngach ionad accam' (which travelled with me to every place).[108] As Plummer explains, this meaning is confirmed by the attempt made to give the word an Irish etymology of *minna aistir* 'journey-relics'.[109] Furthermore, the text explicitly states that a *meinistir* was an item which contained relics of the saints: 'mo ministir maisech móir-fhertach [...] ina bfuil ní do thaisibh na naomh' (My beautiful wonder-working reliquary [...] in which were the relics of the saints).[110]

The description of the *meinistir* in *Vita Tripartita* as being made of bronze and topped with a pipe of gold recalls a small group of Insular house-shaped shrines surviving in Ireland and on the Continent. These portable metal reliquaries date from the sixth to ninth centuries and were possibly originally produced in wood to house the relics of the martyrs of the early Church, obtained primarily from Rome. Indeed, in his examination of these shrines Raghnall Ó Floinn has already made the association between these items and the term *meinistir* used in the Irish sources.[111] Based on this association, Ó Floinn argues that the *velum* described by Tírechán as covering the relics of Peter and Paul could just as easily have been a metal covering as a veil, as translated by Bieler.[112] However, this seems unlikely given the usual sense of *velum* to denote a cloth type covering or curtain.[113] These shrines have been analysed comprehensively by archaeologists so there is no need to repeat all the details here. Along with

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[107] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2961–62 (p. 147).

[108] *Betha Máedóc Ferna II*, ed. by Plummer, 232 (p. 266); *BNÉ*, II, trans. by Plummer, p. 258.

[109] *BNÉ*, II, trans. by Plummer, p. 356 n. 232.

[110] *Betha Máedóc Ferna II*, ed. by Plummer, 232 (p. 266); *BNÉ*, II, trans. by Plummer, p. 258.

[111] Ó Floinn, 'Fragmentary House-Shaped Shrine', p. 54.

[112] Ó Floinn, 'Fragmentary House-Shaped Shrine', p. 54; Tírechán, 48.3 (pp. 160–61).

[113] For example, Exodus 26. 31–33.

Ó Floinn, Michael Ryan and others have described the diminutive Insular house-shaped shrines in detail and brought them to the fore of any study of relic veneration in Ireland.[114] Their diminutive size and the presence of ridge-poles and hooks for transportation indicate that these were portable reliquar-ies, most likely carried around the neck by the guardian of the relics, perhaps by the abbot or other trusted member of the monastic community. They are shaped like miniature churches, perhaps to represent the fact that relics were a vital part of the process of church consecration. They also may be an imitation of late antique sarcophagi and tomb shrines of the saint. In this manner, they represented the whole body and resting place of the saint in miniature. They are at once tiny and exquisitely decorated. The craftsmanship is all the more spec-tacular given their petite size. An excellent example is the Emly Shrine (now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), which is remarkably intact and well dec-orated compared to some of the other specimens.[115] The internal dimensions are so small that the shrine could only have contained minute objects, such as *brandea*. The rough nature of the internal space also suggests the housing of pliable items. This is confirmed by the presence of such textiles in the Ranvaik/Copenhagen shrine, along with bone fragments, a piece of wood, and other items.[116] A piece of parchment authenticates the wood as part of Christ's cross and one of the bone fragments as a relic of St Paul. The Abbadia S. Salvatore shrine also held some small bone fragments.[117]

Whether they were indeed created specifically for contact relics or not, these Insular house-shaped shrines are evidence of relic veneration in early medieval Ireland. One of the largest and latest of the reliquaries is the Clonard shrine, of which only fragments survive. A detailed description is provided by Ó Floinn.[118] It dates to the ninth century; the larger of the two surviving plates of sheet bronze is oblong in shape, measuring 19.2 cm in length and 7.3 cm in width. It is considerably larger than one of the earliest shrines, the Clonmore

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[114] Ó Floinn, 'Fragmentary House-Shaped Shrine'; Anderson, 'Notice of an Ancient Celtic Reliquary'; Swarzenski, 'An Early Anglo-Irish Portable Shrine'; Blindheim, 'A House-Shaped Irish-Scots Reliquary in Bologna'; Ryan, 'Decorated Metalwork in the Museo Dell' Abbazia'; Caldwell, 'The Monymusk Reliquary'.

[115] Full description and analysis provided by Swarzenski, 'An Early Anglo-Irish Portable Shrine'.

[116] Blindheim, 'A House-Shaped Irish-Scots Reliquary in Bologna', pp. 40–44.

[117] Blindheim, 'A House-Shaped Irish-Scots Reliquary in Bologna', p. 47. See also Mancinelli, 'Reliquie e reliquiari'.

[118] Ó Floinn, 'Fragmentary House-Shaped Shrine', pp. 49–51.

(Blackwater) shrine, measuring a minute 8 cm.[119] Given the location in which it was found next to the River Blackwater, Co. Armagh, and the early date *c.* 600, the Clonmore shrine could possibly be equated with one of the shrines (*comrair* or *meinistir*) described above in the Patrician texts. A comparison between the Clonard and Clonmore reliquaries is revealing as they mark two very different periods in relic veneration in Ireland and, indeed, almost act as bookends to the date-range of the current study. There is no evidence of a carrying strap on the Clonmore example although Bourke posits that it may have been transported in a satchel.[120] Furthermore, it was sealed and the contents were viewable through windows in the side and roof. On this basis, the Clonmore shrine is fairly reflective of seventh-century relic veneration, a period for which there is little evidence of relics being taken on tour. The tiny size and rough interior corroborates the suggestion that the reliquary contained tiny Roman contact relics, such as *brandea*. If this shrine can be associated with Armagh it is possible that it was created to house the relics of Peter, Paul, Stephen, and Lawrence, as described in the *Liber Angeli* and Tírechán's *Collectanea*. At the other end of the scale is the large Clonard shrine, representing the fully evolved type, fitted with ridgepole and hooks for carrying. This reflects the growing custom of taking relics on tour, which became increasingly popular in the eighth and ninth centuries, as will be discussed in the next chapter. The larger size also indicates that this shrine could have accommodated larger items than contact relics. Finally, the dates of both shrines correlate with the periods when the saints' cults they are associated with were most actively promoted. The seventh century was a formative period in the cult of Patrick and the late eighth and early ninth centuries were a key period in shaping the cult of Finnian of Clonard.[121]

In his examination of continental portable reliquaries from the sixth to ninth centuries William Conway proposed that these continental shrines were to be identified with the *ministeria* of the early Church, which were used to carry about Eucharistic vessels and the elements of the Eucharist.[122] An Anglo-Saxon example of a house-shaped reliquary at Mortain bears a runic inscription on the back of the lid, 'God help Ǣadan; he 'did' this chrismale'.[123] This is further demonstrated by the depiction of the angels Michael and Gabriel, hold-

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[119] For a full description and analysis, see Bourke, 'Blackwater Shrine'.

[120] Bourke, 'Blackwater Shrine', p. 106.

[121] See Hughes, 'The Cult of St Finnian of Clonard', esp. pp. 17–22.

[122] Conway, 'Portable Reliquaries of the Early Medieval Period', pp. 223, 234–37.

[123] Salin, *La civilisation mérovingienne d'après les sépultures*, IV, 387.

ing what appears to be the Host, flanking Christ on the front of the shrine.[124] Similarly, Snoek shows that the terms *chrismale*, 'Eucharist holder, originally container of holy oil or *chrism*', and *chrismarium*, 'relic holder', became intertwined in the early Church in definition and function.[125] The *DACL* equates the terms *chrismal* and *ministerium*.[126]

The Irish documentary sources describe such items and reinforce the association between the term *meinistir* and the Insular house-shaped shrines. The *Penitential of Cummean* and the later *Vita Comgalli* indicate that Irish clerics carried the Eucharist with them when travelling or working. The *Penitential of Cummean* specified a range of punishments for the many ways in which the host could be mistreated.[127] For example, the text stipulates that the damaged host 'should be burned and the ashes concealed beneath the altar, and he who neglected it shall make good his negligence with forty days (of penance)': 'comburatur et cinis eius sub altari abscondatur, et qui neglexerit quarter denis diebus suam neglegentiam saluat'.[128] Similarly, in his *Monks' Rule*, Columbanus prescribes severe penalties for the abuse of a *chrismal*, and indicates that it often accompanied monks on their daily chores:

> Qui oblitus fuerit chrismal pergens procul ad opus aliquod, quinis quinqueis percussionibus; si super terram in agro dimiserit et invenerit statim, denis quinqueis percussionibus; si in ligno illud levaverit, ter denis, si ibi maneat nocte, superpositione.

> He who has forgotten his chrismal when hurrying out to some work, with five times five blows; if he has dropped it on the ground in a field, and found it at once, with five times ten blows; if he has hung it on a tree, with thrice ten, if it remains there overnight with an imposition.[129]

It is possible that the description of this chrismal in the *Rule of Columbanus* is one of our first references to the actual material artefact in early Christian Ireland. Furthermore, in the *Vita Comgalli* the saint is portrayed as carrying a

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[124] Salin, *La civilisation mérovingienne d'après les sépultures*, Pl. IX.

[125] Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, p. 206.

[126] *DACL*, III, 1479.

[127] *Penitential of Cummean*, ed. and trans. by Bieler, XI (pp. 130–33).

[128] *Penitential of Cummean*, ed. and trans. by Bieler, XI, 20 (pp. 132–33).

[129] Columbanus, *Regulae*, ed. and trans. by Walker, IV (pp. 148–49).

container or *chrismale* under his clothes while working in the fields, when the monastery (Bangor) came under attack by 'heathens'.[130]

Connections between the Eucharist and relics are further consolidated in the Irish word *cretair*, a consecrated object, which seems to be used to refer to both things. Indeed, is not the Eucharist the body of Christ — the holiest of all relics? This blurs the lines for us today and begs the question whether there was a real distinction between these items in the early Christian period. The term *cretair* is used in the sources to mean relic, 'blessed or consecrated object', and indeed its verbal form *cretraid* (*credhrad*) meant to bless or consecrate.[131] Vendryes has shown that the term possesses the original sense of Sanskrit *shrád dadhami*, 'I place my trust', and Old Irish *creitem*, 'the act of believing or having faith',[132] and is also found in Welsh in the form *creir* (later *crair*).[133] The term in Irish, as in Welsh, generally denotes the relics of the saints and by extension the cabinet or shrine in which they are contained. The pre-Christian etymology of the word signifies that it was a talisman or amulet, which provided relief and security.[134] Vendryes argues that the Christian Church in Ireland and Wales found *cretair* such a useful term that the Church adapted it for its own use. This word, like *mind*, therefore, seems to have been adopted by the new Christian religion and invested with the appropriate religious content.[135]

The influential *Penitential of Finnian*, one of the earliest texts of this type, demonstrates this relationship. Penitentials are valuable sources to the historian as they were used by priests engaged in pastoral work and as such can be reflective of societal behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. The text stresses the importance of relics, prescribing seven days penance for any individual who loses a *creatura*, a consecrated object: 'Si quis creaturam uel benedictionem Dei perdiderit, vii dies peniteat' (If anyone loses a consecrated object or a blessing of God, he shall do penance for seven days).[136] In a penitential ascribed to Bede,[137]

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[130] *Vita Sancti Comgalli*, ed. by Plummer, 22 (p. 11).

[131] *DIL*, 2012 C 523.

[132] *DIL*, 2012 C 518.

[133] Vendryes, 'A propos du "croire"', p. 90.

[134] Vendryes, 'A propos du "croire"', p. 96.

[135] For the term *mind*, see Appendix.

[136] *Penitential of Finnian*, ed. and trans. by Bieler, 52 (pp. 92–93). Cf. the *Penitential of Cummean*, ix, 15.

[137] For a summary of the debate concerning Bede's authorship of a penitential, see Frantzen, 'The Penitentials Attributed to Bede'.

creaturam is defined as 'incense, thuribles, tables, or a sheet for writing, or salt that has been blessed, bread newly consecrated, or anything of this sort'.[138] From this evidence, it is possible that the use of the Latin term *creaturam* in an Insular context comes from the Old Irish *cretair*.

In the *Vita Tripartita cretair* refers to water blessed by Patrick, which turned into honey and was used to heal ailments. The text explains that they regarded this water as a relic:

> Ro ucc Patraic iar sin lestar lais docum ind uisci, 7 ro lín 7 ro sén in n-uisce coro sóad i mmil, 7 ro ícc cech ngalar 7 cech n-ainces forsa tardad (.i. roboí do chretraib léo)

> Then Patrick brought a vessel with him to the water, and he filled it, and blessed the water so that it was converted into honey, and it remedied every disease and every ailment to which it was applied, that is, they held it as a blessed object.[139]

Félire Óengusso displays the semantic range of *cretair*. The term is closely associated with the Eucharist and is used to refer to the 'unholiness' of Nero and also to a reliquary.[140] A verse in the epilogue connects *cretair* with communion: 'Is cretar, is communn, is cantaic for salmaib, is dídnad do chredlaib, is écnairc do marbaib' (It's a *cretair*, it's a communion, it's a canticle of psalms, it is comfort to believers, it's a requiem for the dead).[141] The verse further proclaims 'is lúrech im chrabud fri aslaige demnae' (it's a breastplate/corslet around devotion against the temptation of devils).[142] Vendryes explains that the link with this word *lúrech* is instructive and argues that *cretair* in this passage means an instrument or a pledge of protection.[143] *O'Davoren's Glossary* equates *cretair* to *coisecrad*, possibly denoting the consecrated Host.[144] Clearly, the term can be used in a variety of contexts. But, whether it signifies the Host, Eucharistic vessels, holy water, or saintly remains, *cretair* always denotes something treasured and venerated, which was believed to possess special powers.

By equating *creatura* with *benedictio*, the *Penitential of Finnian* provides a valuable early reference to the concrete use of *benedictio* to refer to an actual

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[138] McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 230.

[139] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 170–72 (p. 8).

[140] *Félire*, Prologue, 113 (p. 22).

[141] *Félire*, Epilogue, 189 (p. 273).

[142] *Félire*, Epilogue, 197 (p. 273).

[143] Vendyres, 'A propos du "croire"', p. 93.

[144] 'O'Davoren's Glossary', ed. by Stokes, p. 267.

object rather than an abstract blessing. This more common use of *benedic-tio* to designate a 'blessing, benediction' stems from the verb 'to bless' and is used in early Hiberno-Latin texts such as *Vita Prima*, where the blessed water seems to be imbued with some aphrodisiacal qualities.[145] Typically, this intangible blessing received from the saint produces miraculous results or protection. However, the tangible blessing in the *Penitential of Finnian* may be more instructive in the context of the current study. Finnian seems to follow the example of Paulinus of Nola who, in a letter written to Severus after the dedication of the basilica of Primuliacum, provides an important description of the role of such an object in the consecration of a church.[146] Accordingly, the blessings received by Patrick, Auxilius, Iserninus, and others when they were ordained, as described by Muirchú, could have been tangible items: 'Tum acceptis benedictionibus perfectis omnibus secundum morem' (They received blessings, performed everything according to custom).[147] Indeed, Gregory the Great essentially conceived of *benedictiones* as gifts and equated them with *reliquiae* and *brandea*.[148]

The development of the Irish term in this manner reflects the intrinsic link between the consecrated Eucharist and items termed relics. As stated above, we must cease regarding these items as always distinct. Relics and the Eucharist were equated at the Council of Chelsea in 816. On the consecration of churches the Council ordained:

> Ubi aecclesias aedificentur, [...] Postea Eucharistia, quae ab Episcopo per eodem ministerium consecratur, cum aliis reliquiis conditur in capsela, ac servetur in eadem basilica. Et si alii reliquias intimare non potest, tamen hoc maxime proficere potest, quia Corpus et Sanguis est Domini nostri Jesu Christi.

> When a church is built, [...] Let the Eucharist, which is consecrated by the bishop by the same ministry, along with other relics be placed by him in a container and let it be preserved in that same basilica. And if he is unable to place in it other relics, nonetheless this alone is surely sufficient because it is the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.[149]

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[145] *Vita Prima*, 41 (p. 124).

[146] Paulinus, *Epistulae*, ed. by de Hartel, Epistle 32, 8 (pp. 283–84).

[147] Muirchú, I, 9.4 (pp. 174–75).

[148] McCulloh, 'Letters and "Dialogues" of Pope Gregory the Great', pp. 169–75.

[149] 'Council of Celchyth', ed. by Haddan and Stubbs, 2 (p. 580).

By placing Irish developments within continental and early Christian contexts, it is quite clear that relics played a key role in church consecration in early medieval Ireland. Increasingly, relics were utilized in the routine activities of the Church, acting as an integral and often defining feature of every ecclesiastical foundation. As an active part of a community's Eucharistic worship, the cult of relics became an intrinsic element in the daily rituals and liturgy of the Church. These functions evolved into a situation where relics could be exchanged or gifted between individual churches in order to bind them to one another, raising the status of relics to physical representations and *insignia* of ecclesiastical communities. The final two chapters will follow the progression of this symbolic role of relics.

The Formal Use of Relics in Early Ireland

As part of the cult of the saints, the veneration of relics became central to Christian piety. The use of relics in church consecration helped forge a close relationship between the church and the community. It is difficult to ascertain the exact details of the progression of relics from objects of popular devotion to political tools of the power brokers in medieval society. Given the appeal of relics as tangible manifestations of various secular and religious cults it would be plausible to suggest that the ultimate power of relics lay in their popularity among the faithful. It would perhaps be too simple to argue that the early church leaders took advantage of this popularity and attempted to wield its inherent power only for their own benefit. A rapidly expanding and evolving organization such as the early Church needed a relatively intricate but clear hierarchy and bureaucracy, which could be easily reproduced and emulated. Relics became a useful and integral part of this process. By providing tangible foci for popular devotion and becoming an essential part of church consecration, the cult of relics provided a concrete avenue of contact with lay society. The Church in many ways was able to gain such a powerful position in society because it utilized and fostered more formalized systems of law and government. An analysis of the evidence for early Ireland reveals a similarly intermediary role of relics in Irish society. This social and political use of relics is perhaps the best understood aspect of the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland, as shown in some detail by scholars such as Lucas and Etchingham.[1] However,

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[1] Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics'; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, esp. chaps 5 and 6.

it still merits discussion here in order to place it within the wider context of the cult of relics as a whole in early Irish history.

Relics and Oath Taking

The end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth appear to have been a particularly difficult period in Irish society, characterized by famine, disease, and political upheaval.[2] Against this backdrop, the Church may have promoted the cult of saints partly to provide comfort and hope during tumultuous times. As Doherty has pointed out, both the cult of relics and the production of hagiography were well underway by the end of the seventh century, reflecting the development of an organized cult of saints at this time.[3] Saints acted on their community's behalf. This is evident in a seventh-century Old Irish hymn attributed to Colmán of the moccu Chluasaig, in response to the Yellow Plague.[4] The poem beseeches the saints of the Bible for protection against plague and famine:

> Itge Abéil maicc Adaim, Hele, Enoc, diar cobuir: ronsoerat ar diangalar sechip leth fon mbith foguir. Noe ocus Abraham, Isac in macc adamrae immuntísat ar thedmaim náchantairle adamnae […] Iohain Baptist adsluinnem rop ditiu dún rop snadud! Ísu cona apstalaib rop diar cobuir fri gábud!

> May the prayer of Abel son of Adam, Enoch, Elias help us; may they save us from swift disease (?) on whatever side, throughout the noisy world! Noah and Abraham, Isaac the wonderful son, may they surround us against pestilence, that famine may not come to us! […] John the Baptist we invoke, may he be a safeguard to us, a protection! may Jesus with His apostles be for our help against danger![5]

Scholars have explored how the generation of hagiography (and the associated cult of relics) was key to facilitating the creation and promotion of saints' cults.[6] Very often vested interests fuelled the effective growth and advertise-

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[2] Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c*. 800', pp. 580–84; Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade', p. 71.

[3] Doherty, 'Use of Relics', p. 94.

[4] *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 298–306; MacNeill, 'A Pioneer of Nations', p. 438, seems to accept Colmán's authorship although the last part of the hymn is attributed to Diarmait úa Tigernáin, coarb of Armagh in the mid-ninth century. Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 726–27, dates the language to the first half of the ninth century.

[5] *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 300–01.

[6] For a useful overview of the scholarly developments in this area, see Howard-Johnston and Hayward, *The Cult of Saints*.

ment of these cults, and it is in this enterprise that we can gain an interesting insight into the interactions between ecclesiastical and secular authorities in medieval Europe. For example, social anthropologist Mary Douglas elucidates the ways in which hierarchical societies use times of difficulty and suffering to uphold the moral law and reinforce social discipline.[7] In the Irish context, the eighth-century sabbatarian ordinance *Cáin Domnaig* implies that maintenance of the law of the Sabbath would prevent the wrath of God and pestilence on the fields: 'Ar is ar tairmthecht Domnuig do-beir Día plága forsna gurta [...] Is ed do-beir nauna ⁊ gortai ⁊ sína sóeba for tótha cloéna'[8] (For on account of the transgression of Sunday God brings pestilences on the fields [...] This it is that brings famines, hungers, and unseasonable weathers on perverse peoples).[9] Likewise, a miracle story in *Vita Prima* portrays the healing power of Brigit's non-corporeal relics as providing succour when necessary.[10] In this episode Brigit gave her belt, or girdle, to a poor woman of the Moccu Uais (*nepotibus Gais*) so that she could heal the many sick people from her area:

> Dixitque Brigida: Zonam meam portabis. Dixisti enim mihi, multos morbos habere in regione vestra, et per zonam meam intinctam in aqua, in nomine Jesu Christi sanabis eos, et dabunt tibi victum et vestimentum.

> So Brigit said, 'You'll have my girdle. For you tell me there are many sick people in your part of the country and you will heal them in the name of Jesus Christ by means of my girdle dipped in water and they will give you food and clothing.'[11]

Furthermore, in his *Vita Columbae*, Adomnán explicitly details how relics were used to invite the intercession of the saint in difficult times. In one case the relics were placed on the altar in the hope that the saint would convert contrary winds to favourable ones.[12] We can see in these texts the potency, not only of the actual bodies of Brigit and Columba, but of items associated with the saints in their lifetime.

The devotional power of relics was ultimately given legal sanction by the use of relics for swearing oaths and cementing treaties. Chapter 1 above detailed

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[7] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 110.

[8] 'Cáin Domnaig', ed. and trans. by Hull, pp. 156–58. Earlier scholars dated the text to the ninth century. See Kenney, *Sources*, pp. 476–77; Binchy, 'Irish Law Tracts Re-edited', p. 59.

[9] 'Cáin Domnaig', ed. and trans. by Hull, 10–11 (pp. 170–71).

[10] *Vita Prima*, 42 (p. 124).

[11] *Vita Prima*, 42 (p. 124); trans. by Connolly, 44.2 (p. 25).

[12] *VSC*, ii, 45 (p. 174).

the gradual legalization of this practice in the early Church. The pre-Christian 'trial by ordeal' was also appropriated by the early medieval Church and survived for many centuries.[13] In early Ireland Patrick is credited with introducing a semi-Christianized version of an ordeal by poison, referred to as 'airisem oc altóir' (waiting at an altar), which integrated circumambulation of the altar into the trial.[14] Several of the vernacular law texts refer to the legal validity of oaths sworn in cemeteries in early Ireland. The eighth-century legal text *Cóic Conara Fugill* reveals that witnesses took an oath over relics or at a saint's grave: 'tri .xx. (fichit) fer do martra imon comraiti' (sixty men to give witness at a saint's tomb about the deliberate act).[15] This law tract is of utmost importance for only in it are the five procedural 'paths' or pleas, by which Irish litigants pursued and resolved disputes in the presence of a judge, enumerated and explored.[16] The practice may have arisen out of a pagan practice of swearing in cemeteries. Lucas has suggested that the person taking an oath on a grave would very likely have been related to the deceased 'so that, in pagan times, the oath-taker would have believed himself to be invoking the spirit of an ancestor or testifying in his presence'.[17] Saints' graves and tombs appropriated the legal functions of ancestral focal tombs in traditional burial grounds. An early law tract describing *tellach*, 'legal entry', outlines the importance of *ferta* as boundary markers.[18] The text describes the procedure to be used by a person who claims a piece of land by virtue of their hereditary right. Integral to the process is the role of the *fert*, which the claimant must walk over to access the land. The implication to be drawn from the text is that this act is only safe for the claimant if, indeed, he is a descendant of the man buried in the *fert*, as the buried man would repel outsiders, not kinsmen.[19] Recent archaeological investigation now corroborates the legal use of *ferta* for delineating territorial boundaries and shows that these

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[13] For an overview, see Snoek, *Medieval Piety*, pp. 133–35.

[14] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 210.

[15] *Cóic Conara Fugill*, ed. by Thurneysen, 52 (p. 38).

[16] Stacey, *The Road to Judgment*, p. 114.

[17] Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics', p. 25.

[18] *CIH*, I, 205.22–213.37. This text is given the later title of *Din Techtugad*. See Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 186–87, 280; Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics', pp. 221, 227–28, 234–35; Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp. 259–61. Charles-Edwards, 'Boundaries in Irish Law', p. 83, dates the tract to the late sixth or early seventh centuries.

[19] Charles-Edwards, 'Boundaries in Irish Law', p. 86.

ferta were often located in prominent geographical positions.[20] The burial evidence also indicates that during the later Iron Age period important individuals were buried in ancestral *ferta*, possibly to legitimize a claim to territory.[21] Oaths on saintly graves and relics thus fitted into a pre-existing cultural matrix in a process of assimilation along comparable lines to burial *ad sanctos*.

The Church promoted the idea that only oaths made in Christian contexts were valid. The *First Synod of Patrick* condemned oath taking in the manner of pagans as comparable to murder and adultery.[22] The construction of saints' shrines would have helped to augment the role of churches in the legal process by providing a clear and familiar context for the swearing of oaths. The old Irish law tract *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, 'On Confirmation of the Rights and the Law', provides possible evidence for this practice.[23] It states that 'Tal no slisean seancraind' (An adze/cutting or chip of an old tree) was one of the tests established by Patrick to decide disputes.[24] The later glosses to the text explain the meaning of this phrase as follows: '[Tal] .i. tenga tar tal n-erderg. [Slisean seancraind] .i. slisiu don crand sin, d'echlaisc in erlama ł comraid inn erlama, in crand coisecartha' (An adze i.e. the tongue *was put* across a red-hot adze. A chip of an old tree i.e. a chip of the old tree, of the horse-rod of the *érlam*, or of the casket of the *érlam*, or the consecrated tree).[25] This implies oaths could be sworn on the *comrar* (shrine, casket, coffin) of the *érlam*, 'the patron saint'.[26] Moreover, the *Hibernensis* explains why ecclesiastical courts of appeal were performed at the gate or entrance to the *tabernaculum* or *templum*:

> Moyese judicabat in porta tabernaculi, ut convocaret multitudinem populi et seniores Israel ad ostium tabernaculi. Salomon in ostio tabernaculit judicabat.[27]

> Moses used to give judgement at the gate of the *tabernaculum* in order that he might convene a multitude of people and the older men of Israel at the entrance of the *tabernaculum*. Solomon used to give judgement at the entrance of the *tabernaculum*.

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[20] O'Brien, 'Irish Boundary *Ferta*', p. 55.

[21] O'Brien, 'Pagan or Christian?', p. 145.

[22] *Synodus I S. Patricii*, ed. by Bieler, 14 (p. 56).

[23] This is the late title of the text given in *CIH*, III, 1060.3.

[24] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, p. 238.4

[25] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, pp. 238.5–6.

[26] *DIL*, 2012 C 408. For the meaning of *érlam*, see chap. 6 below and *DIL*, 2012 E 170.

[27] *Hibernensis*, 21.4 (p. 63). For discussion, see Swift, 'Forts and Fields', p. 107.

The vernacular version of this term, *tabernacuil*, is glossed as *tempul* in the Milan glosses on the Psalms, and is described as a consecrated place in which the faithful would gather.[28] Furthermore, later uses of the Latin *tabernaculum* in continental sources show that it was used to refer to a place for relics or the part of the altar where the Eucharist was stored.[29] Oaths were also clearly taken inside churches, presumably for the proximity to the relics and the Eucharist. The *Additamenta* is witness to this practice and recounts an occasion when an alliance was ratified within a church. We are told that Feth Fio declared his allegiance to Patrick between the altar and the chancel of his foundation at Drumlease:

> Is sí inso coibse Fétho Fio 7 a edocht di bliadin re mbas dáu du manchuib Drommo Lías 7 du maithib Callrigi iter crochaingel 7 altóir Drommo Lias.

> This is Fith Fio's confession and his bequest two years before his death to the monks of Drumlease and the nobles of Calrige between the chancel and the altar in Drumlease.[30]

The legal material also places an emphasis on a multiplicity of cemeteries as fortifying an oath. *Cóic Conara fugill* refers to the doubling of the number of persons swearing in the cemetery: 'diablad luchta fira docum reilgi'.[31] Furthermore, glosses in *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid* explain that a child of questionable parentage whose mother is dead, may be received into his father's kindred if he offers seven *cumal*s, each *cumal* having the force of an oath.[32] However, if the *cumal*s are not forthcoming the boy could instead offer his oath at seven cemeteries: 'dombeir fo .uii. relgaib'.[33] *Relgaib* here most likely refers to cemeteries and not relics as translated by Atkinson, because elsewhere in the law texts the distinction is clearly made between swearing on relics and swearing in graveyards.[34] An oath cementing a contract could be sworn at one cemetery, but an oath concerning one's role in a matter of personal injury had to be sworn at three: 'Cach fir fogla uile ag teoro reilg, Cach fir chuir 7 cunnartha ic aonrileg' (Every

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[28] *Thes. Pal.*, I, 147, 277.

[29] DuCange, *Glossarium*, VIII, 3.

[30] *Additamenta*, ed. by Bieler, 9 (1) (p. 172). Cf. Tírechán, 46.2 (p. 158).

[31] *Cóic Conara Fugill*, ed. by Thurneysen, 50 (p. 37).

[32] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, pp. 232.29–31.

[33] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, p. 232.31

[34] *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, V, 454.

oath respecting trespass must be taken at three cemeteries; every oath respecting contract and covenant at a single cemetery).[35] The language clearly distinguishes between the efficacies of the different relics. Three *minna* were equal to three cemeteries in this regard: '7 o bet tri minnadh saine […] and, gabait greim tri relec' (but if there be in the place three separate relics, they have the force of three cemeteries).[36] This is a very significant extract as it shows how the increasing seriousness of an oath requires it to be taken at multiple cemeteries, thus indicating how this practice evolved. The text elaborates that 'ícho dlegar minna aili do beth foran ulaid, 7 da rabait, geibit greim reilgi uili' (there is no need for other relics to be on the tomb, but if there are such, they all have the force of cemeteries).[37] It seems in this case that one could ostensibly reduce the amount of footwork required by swearing on *minna* on top of the tomb within the cemetery. Although *minna* and *reilgi* denoted different types of relics, they were thus seemingly functionally interchangeable regarding oath taking.[38]

Oath taking on relics became the norm to the extent that the term *mind* developed the secondary meaning of 'oath', and is the standard word for oath, *mionn*, in modern Irish.[39] The glosses and commentary added to the eighth-century law tract *Di Astud Chor*, which is the central text on contract law, highlight the importance of *minna* in swearing oaths and providing surety.[40] The glosses on the text explain that effective oaths are those made on relics.[41] Furthermore, the commentary states that an oath on the Gospel is comparable to an oath on relics.[42] But exactly what type of relic was a *mind*? The Irish used this native term to denote associative or secondary relics, and it is often equated with the Latin term *insignia*, 'mark, emblem, symbol, ensign, badge', in the

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[35] *CIH*, III, 820.42–821.1; trans. by Plummer, 'Notes on Some Passages in the Brehon Laws', p. 114.

[36] *CIH*, III, 821.1; trans. by Plummer, 'Notes on Some Passages in the Brehon Laws', p. 114.

[37] *CIH*, III, 821.4–5; trans. by Plummer, 'Notes on Some Passages in the Brehon Laws', p. 114.

[38] For more details on these terms, see Appendix.

[39] *DIL*, 2012 M 144.

[40] McLeod, *Early Irish Contract Law*.

[41] McLeod, *Early Irish Contract Law*, 5 (p. 130).

[42] McLeod, *Early Irish Contract Law*, p. 280. This corresponds directly to continental practice. Oaths on the Gospels were taking place in the East since the Council of Chalcedon. Oaths on Gospels were prescribed by the Frankish king Chilperic in 534. Oath taking on relics was replaced in the eleventh century by oaths on Gospels. See Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*, pp. 236–37, 249.

Hiberno-Latin texts.[43] Originally meaning a distinguishing badge or emblem of rank, in the vernacular prose literature the term *mind* refers to royal headwear, such as crowns, and thus clearly denotes a symbol of authority. Consequently, *mind* appears to have been a pre-existing term meaning a sign or emblem. The equation of *minna* with *insignia* is thus readily intelligible in the context of the cult of relics. In practice, associative or enshrined relics like crosiers, bells, and books were deemed appropriate emblematic items in the early Irish Church.

Bells and staffs were the most commonly enshrined items in medieval Ireland, especially in later centuries right up to the early modern period. This clearly reflects the Irish fascination with this category of items, associative relics, as claimed by Gerald of Wales in the twelfth century.[44] Statements asserting the emphasis on associative rather than corporeal relics in medieval Ireland, therefore, are more appropriate in later contexts. As will be clear in this chapter and the next, the insignia of the saint became increasingly important in ecclesiastical politics and in representing communities. Indeed, Bourke reveals the unique role of bells and staffs in the cult of relics.[45] He shows that there can be no doubt that by the late seventh century they were both part of ecclesiastical apparatus in regular use, including also the wine strainer, the tomb-shaped reliquary, and clerical vestments.[46] Furthermore, he reveals that the bell and staff are represented in Insular sources as the twin insignia of early ecclesiastics of rank.[47] Most literary references to these associative relics and the actual surviving artefacts themselves are dated to the later medieval period, and are thus technically beyond the confines of the current study. Since Lucas, Bourke, and Overbey, amongst others, have already contributed greatly to the study of associative relics, there is little need for a detailed analysis in the current work.[48] However, a brief overview is useful in order to confirm the connection of the terminology with specific types of relics. Crosiers or staffs are associated with both the sceptres of secular rulers and the walk-

[43] For this and what follows, see the Appendix.

[44] Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, ed. by Dimock, 33 (p. 179).

[45] See Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II'; Bourke, 'Early Irish Hand-Bells'; Bourke, 'Irish Crosiers of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries'. For further information on crosiers, see Murray, 'The "Hidden Power" of the Irish Crosier'; Murray, 'Insular-Type Crosiers'.

[46] Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II', p. 163.

[47] Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II', p. 166.

[48] Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics'; Bourke, 'Early Irish Hand-Bells'; Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II'; Overbey, *Sacral Geographies*. See Introduction above for further references.

ing sticks of monks. These emblematic items are revered as relics that embody the sacrality of the holy person and are imbued with their holiness. We have seen that relics served many purposes. One of the key functions of associative relics was the legitimization of rule or a ruler. Possession of these relics represented a physical link to a universally acknowledged powerful former patron or leader. Josef Meri's analysis of the cult of saints in medieval Syria emphasizes the key role of saintly relics in the conferral and formation of temporal and spiritual power. He reveals that the 'Abbāsid caliphs in the early Middle Ages employed the staff and mantle of the prophet Muhammad to represent their authority in battles and ceremonies.[49] Likewise, portable artefacts that were key to the functioning of the early Irish Church became powerful totems and symbols of individual churches and communities. As bells, books, and staffs were regarded as typical accessories of early Irish Church founders and saints they inevitably qualified for preservation as relics. While the mantle of the prophet Muhammad was carried into battle by the 'Abbāsid caliphs, we can also observe the later common use of relics as battle talismans in medieval Ireland.[50] The most famous of these was the *Cathach*, a late sixth/early seventh-century manuscript believed to have been written by Columba, and the oldest extant Irish manuscript.[51] In the eleventh century a shrine was made for it and the manuscript was named the 'Cathach' (Battler) from the vernacular term meaning 'bellicose, vehement, warlike',[52] reflecting the practice of carrying it around the field of battle to ensure victory: 'Agus da cuirther tri huaire desiul a timchell sluaigh Cineoil Conaill é, ag dul docum cat[h]a doib, is dual co ticfadh slan fa buaidh' (And if it is borne thrice sunwise round the host of the clan of Conall when they go into battle, they come back safe in triumph).[53] As the Gospel and the word of God have a special place in Christianity, books were deemed key emblematic relics of saints and sanctity. The emphasis placed on learning and reproducing the written word in early medieval Ireland may account for the veneration of books as relics. Indeed, books were particularly

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[49] Meri, *Cult of Saints in Medieval Syria*, pp. 108–17.

[50] Meri, *Cult of Saints in Medieval Syria*, pp. 108–17. For a detailed list of Irish examples, see Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics', pp. 17–20.

[51] See Esposito, 'The Cathach of St. Columba'; Lawlor, Armstrong, and Lindsay, 'The Cathach of St. Columba'.

[52] *DIL*, 2012 C 87.

[53] *Betha Colaim Chille*, ed. by O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, 178 (pp. 182–83).

popular candidates for enshrinement, and the National Museum of Ireland contains many of these treasured objects.[54]

The staff or crosier was a particularly important relic because it was thought of as the principal vehicle of the saint's power, 'a kind of spiritual electrode through which he conveyed the holy energy by which he wrought the innumerable miracles attributed to him'.[55] Armagh's most precious relic and the most famous *bachall* in medieval Ireland was the *Bachall Ísu* or Staff of Jesus. It was, as the name suggests, believed to have belonged to Jesus and was reputedly given to Patrick by God according to the ninth-century hagiography of Patrick:

> Igitur per mare Tyrrenum nauigando transiuit, et acepit baculum Iesu a quodam iuuene in quadam insula hospitium Christo tribuente. Et locutus est Dominus cum Patricio in monte et praecepit ei ut ad Hyberniam ueniret.

> Therefore he sailed and crossed the Tyrrhene Sea, and received the Staff of Jesus from a youth on an island who offered hospitality to Christ. And the Lord spoke with Patrick on a mountain and commanded him to go to Ireland.[56]

The *Vita Tripartita* elaborates that the staff 'would be a helper to him in every difficulty and in every unequal conflict in which he might be' (ropad fortachtaigthid do hi cech guasacht 7 hi cech écomnart i mbiad).[57] The *Bachall Ísu* was first mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 789, when it and the other relics of Patrick were profaned during an assembly at Ráth Airthir: 'Sarugad Bachlu Isu 7 minn Patraic la Donnchad m. nDomnaill oc Raith Airthir ar oenach' (Dishonouring of the Staff of Jesus and relics of Patrick by Donnchad son of Domnall at Ráth Airthir at an *óenach*).[58] This crosier and its undoubted importance as one of the most prestigious relics of Armagh has received much warranted attention from scholars over the years.[59] This is clearly due to the enduring eminence of this artefact into the high Middle Ages.

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[54] See Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries*; Wallace and Ó Floinn, *Treasures of the National Museum*.

[55] Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics', p. 9.

[56] *Vita Quarta*, ed. by Bieler, 29 (p. 77); 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick', trans. by Francis and Byrne, p. 37. Cf. the same episode in *Vita Tertia*, ed. by Bieler, xvi, 23 (p. 131).

[57] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 282–83 (p. 19).

[58] There is no direct translation for the Irish term *óenach*, 'a reunion, gathering, assembly'. See *DIL*, 2012 O 23.

[59] See, for example, Clarke, 'Conversion, Church and Cathedral'; Cunningham and Gillespie, 'The Most Adaptable of Saints'; Bourke, *Patrick*; Lucas, 'Social Role of Relics'; Mac Giolla

Beautiful and elaborate shrines were designed to protect and glorify these associative relics. Many of these metal reliquaries were constructed in the twelfth century and reflect the relative wealth of that period.[60] Early examples include the Moylough belt shrine, and the Lough Kinale book shrine. There is also a fascinating group of corporeal relic shrines called body-shaped reliquaries. The shrine of St Lachtin's arm, a stunning example which dates to between 1118 and 1121, contains an older wooden hand reliquary.[61] Another intriguing item is the shrine of Patrick's tooth — the purported physical manifestation of the story related by Tírechán in which Patrick gave his tooth to his disciple Brón as a relic.[62] Cynthia Hahn argues that body-shaped reliquaries are much more than just representational vessels identifying the relic they contained, in fact 'speaking' much more than their contents.[63]

The importance of bells in the daily routine of an early Irish cleric may account for the special reverence reserved for these items in the Irish sources. Possibly one of our earliest Old Irish texts, the *Apgitir Chrábaid*,[64] mentions laziness at answering a bell in a list of traits that should be avoided by holy people.[65] Some bells associated with saints have survived; the best known being that attributed to Patrick named *Cloc ind Aidechta* or the Bell of the Testament.[66] Its shrine survives, along with other examples, whole or fragmentary, in the National Museum of Ireland. A twelfth-century interpolation into the *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 553, supposedly from the 'Book of Cuanu', establishes the *Cloc ind Aidechta* as one of the relics of Patrick.[67] The interpolation states

Phádraig, 'St. Patrick; his Crozier; his Writings'; Ronan, 'St. Patrick's Staff and Christ Church'.

[60] Though they perhaps were built to replace earlier wooden reliquaries?

[61] For this reliquary, see Coffey, *Guide to Celtic Antiquities*, pp. 53–54; Murray, 'The Arm-Shaped Reliquary of St. Lachtin'.

[62] Tírechán, 45.4 (p. 158).

[63] Hahn, 'The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries', p. 20.

[64] '*Apgitir Chrábaid*', ed. and trans. by Hull; trans. by Clancy and Márkus, pp. 200–07; Ó Néill, 'The Date and Authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*'. The text is traditionally believed to have been composed *c*. 600. However, there are also convincing arguments that it may have been composed in the eighth century. See Haggart, 'Some Comments on *Apgitir Chrábaid*', for a succinct summary of the arguments and evidence to support the later date.

[65] *Apgitir Chrábaid*', ed. and trans. by Hull, 10 (p. 63).

[66] Bourke, *Patrick*, pp. 40–43.

[67] See Sharpe, 'Paleographical Considerations', pp. 24–25 on the historicity and date of this document and the annal entry. See also Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, I, 101 n. 1, who claims that this entry was not earlier than *c*. 1100.

that Colum Cille put three noble *minna* of Patrick in a shrine sixty years after his death:

> Sic in Libro Cuanach inueni: .i. Reilci Patraic do tabairt i scrin i cinn tri .xx.it bliadnae iar n-etsecht Patraic la Colum Cille. Tri minna uaisli do faghbail isin adhnucal, .i. a choach 7 Soiscela ind Aingil, 7 Clocc in Aidhechta. Is amlaid so ro fhoghail int aingel do Colum Cille inna minna, .i. in coach do Dhun, 7 Cloc in Aidachta do Ard Macha, 7 Soiscela inn Aingil do Colum Cille fein. Is aire do garar Soiscela in Aingil de, ar is a laim in aingil arroet Colum Cille he.[68]

> Thus I find in the Book of Cuanu, namely, the relics of Patrick were placed in a shrine by Colum Cille, sixty years after Patrick's death. Three splendid *minna* were found in the grave, namely his goblet, and the Angel's Gospel, and the Bell of the Testament. This is how the angel distributed the *minna* for Colum Cille, the goblet to Dún, the Bell of the Testament to Armagh, and the Angel's Gospel to Colum Cille himself. The reason it is called the Angel's Gospel is because Colum Cille received it from the hand of the angel.

Could this be an indication that the body of Patrick had been the object of a translation and that the rival communities who venerated the saint had agreed to share his relics? The language is significant here as both the terms *reilic* and *mind* are used in the same passage. An analysis of these terms would indicate that perhaps *reilci* refers to all the relics of Patrick that were buried, including his corporeal remains, whereas *minna* referred specifically to the three named non-corporeal or associative relics.[69]

References to *minna* in the annals often place them at assemblies and *óenaig*. For example, the *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 784 record the entry of the relics of the son of Erc (or of Mac Eirc?) into the famous site of the assembly or *óenach* — Tailtiu (Teltown, Co. Meath): 'Aduentus reliquiarum filii Eirc ad ciuitatem Tailten'. Relics were brought to these gatherings not only to lend prestige and official sanction to the occasion, but also to be on hand for oath taking and to seal compacts and agreements. Most of our earliest explicit references to the presence of relics at these assemblies record instances where relics were profaned or violated. The role of relics in oath taking led to their increasing use in the expanding bureaucracy of the Church. Intimately connected with this growing administration was the establishment and codification of specific laws in early Ireland, often sponsored by important churches and ecclesiastical centres.

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[68] *AU, s.a.* 553.

[69] See Appendix.

Relics and the Promulgation of Laws

The codification of laws may have begun in the late seventh century with *Cáin Fhuithirbe*,[70] *Cáin Éimíne Báin*,[71] and Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* (Law of the Innocents) aimed at protecting non-combatants (especially women and children) and church property from violence.[72] Felim Ó Briain and James F. Kenney have emphasized that such laws may have been created and enforced to generate income on behalf of the Church.[73] However, in the earliest period laws such as the *Lex Innocentium* appear to have been instigated, at least partly, out of a genuine need to regulate disorder and to provide protection for the weaker members of society.[74] Laws were often promulgated at assemblies or *óenaig* and reflected the growing collaboration between secular and ecclesiastical authorities. The *Lex Innocentium* was brought into law at the Synod of Birr in 697 in the presence of leading members of society — both religious and lay.[75] The ninth-century *Epistil Ísu*, closely related to *Cáin Domnaig*, states that this ordinance should be ratified at the beginning of every assembly: 'Fortá fortórmach na cána sa; nach dál 7 nach oirecht conrisar la túathu 7 rígu árim cáin domnaig cétadéntar ann' (There is a further enactment of this law: whatsoever meeting and whatsoever assembly in which tribes or kings meet, that it be the law of Sunday which is first passed therein).[76] In 783, the king of the Connachta, Tipraite mac Taidg, and Dub dá Leithe promulgated the Law of Patrick over the Connachta at Crúachain, presumably on the occasion of an *óenach* or some form of assembly: 'Forus Cano Patricii hi Cruachnibh la Dub da Leithi 7 la Tipraiti filium Taidhgg'.[77] This is a potentially significant reference to Crúachain as the capital of the province. A later entry in the *Annals of*

[70] See Breatnach, '*Cáin Fhuithirbe*', pp. 45–47, who, following Binchy ('On the Date and Provenance of *Uraicecht Becc*', p. 53), dates the text to within a few years of 680. Ó Coileáin, 'Mag Fuithirbe Revisited', pp. 23–24, argues that the text could theoretically have been composed as late as *c.* 750.

[71] Poppe, '*Cáin Éimíne Báin*'.

[72] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer; Márkus, *Adomnán's Law of the Innocents*; O'Loughlin, *Adomnán at Birr*; 'The Law of Adomnán: A Translation', trans. by Ní Dhonnchadha.

[73] Ó Briain, 'Hagiography of Leinster', p. 458; Kenney, *Sources*, p. 237.

[74] See, for example, Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 150–53.

[75] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the Law of the Innocents', p. 13. For details of the signatories of the Law, see Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cain Adamnáin*', pp. 180–214.

[76] '*Cáin Domnaig*', ed. and trans. by O'Keeffe, 33 (pp. 210–11).

[77] *AU, s.a.* 783.

Ulster also testifies to the promulgation of laws at Crúachain: 'Lex Quiarani for Cruachna eleuata est la Muirghus' (Ciarán's Law was exalted at Crúachain by Muirgius).[78] The promulgation of the Law of Patrick in 783 may have taken place to provide order and stability, since the other entries in the same annal indicate that it was a very difficult year, including storms, disease, murders, battles, and the burning of Armagh.[79]

Initially, the annals used the Latin term *lex* to designate these laws. The vernacular term *cáin* appears for the first time in 783.[80] While this reflects the evolving language of the annals it also marks the evolution of the terminology to mark the changing perceptions of what these laws actually represented. The term *cáin* originally had the meaning 'law' but also denoted 'rent', 'tribute', and 'tax'.[81] *Cáin* is frequently glossed as *ríagail* 'rule' in the law texts.[82] It has been regarded as a borrowing from the Latin *canon* (model, rule, standard, law), but though satisfactory from the semantic point of view this explanation is impossible to justify on phonological grounds.[83] M. A. O'Brien suggested that *cáin* was cognate with the Slavonic *kazni*.[84] Both terms are feminine i-stems and both have the primary meaning of 'regulation, *Regelung*' and the secondary meaning of 'punishment (by fine or otherwise) for breach of a regulation, *Strafe*'. He also makes the connection between *cáin* and the verb *cáinid* 'lampoon, satirize', arguing that this originally had the meaning of 'punish by lampooning' and in this regard again it is similar to the Slavonic language in which *kasniti* means 'to punish'.[85]

While the specific legal significance of *cáin* is difficult to define it may have referred to statute law imposed by an institution such as a king or the Church, as opposed to the customary law. The single use of the term in *Críth Gablach* is in the section detailing the property and responsibilities of the *aire déso*. The lowest of noble grades,[86] the *aire déso* 'Imdích dliged a chéle cintaib cuir, cáin,

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[78] *AU, s.a.* 814.

[79] *AU, s.a.* 783.

[80] *AU, s.a.* 783.

[81] *DIL*, 2012 C 30.

[82] See, for example, the gloss in 'Cáin Aigillne', *CIH*, v, 1778.36–1779.3.

[83] *Cóic Conara Fugill*, ed. by Thurneysen, p. 66.

[84] O'Brien, 'Etymologies and Notes', p. 172.

[85] O'Brien, 'Etymologies and Notes', p. 172.

[86] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, p. 70.

cairddi[u] co neoch atallen'[87] (protects the rights of his clients in regard of liabilities, justice, statute-law, and treaty-law).[88] Eoin MacNeill here translates it as statute law, thus distinguishing it from *cairde*, 'treaty law'. This wider sense of *cáin* to mean written law is possibly derived from its use to refer to such monastic ordinances as the *cána* of Adomnán, Patrick, and the *Cáin Domnaig*, and corresponds with the frequent references to these laws in the annals.[89]

Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium* was promulgated at the Synod of Birr in 697. Under this year the annals record that 'Adomnanus ad Hiberniam pergit 7 dedit Legem Inocentium populis' (Adomnán went to Ireland and gave his *Lex Innocentium* to the people).[90] However, our primary witness is the later legal tract or treatise *Cáin Adamnáin*.[91] This *cáin* is referred to as *recht Adomnáin* in *Críth Gablach* indicating that the term, at this early date, was synonymous with *recht* — which can be more confidently equated with the English word 'law':

> Ar ataat teoir rechtgai ata chórai do ríg do giull fora thúatha: rechtge do indarbbu echtarchiníuil .i. fri Saxanu, 7 rechtge fri tuar toraid, 7 recht(t) crettme adannai, amail ron(n)gab recht Adamnáin.

> For there are three [ordinances] of a king to which it is proper for a king to bind his *tuatha* by pledge: [an ordinance] for the expulsion of a stranger-kindred i.e. against the Saxons, and [an ordinance] for the cultivation of produce (?), and a law of faith that illuminates, such as the Law of Adamnán.[92]

Accordingly, it is possible that at this early stage *cáin* referred to law, and then later came to mean tribute or fine, mirroring the evolution of the term *cúairt*, due to its association with the levying of a tax or fine.[93] *Críth Gablach* also shows that these laws or compacts were made at assemblies. The text enumer-

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[87] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, ll. 339–40 (p. 14).

[88] MacNeill, 'Law of Status or Franchise', p. 297.

[89] MacNeill, 'Law of Status or Franchise', p. 79; Thurneysen, 'Aus dem irischen Recht', p. 396.

[90] Cf. *AI*, *s.a.* 696, 'Adamnán do chor chána for Érind'; *CS*, *s.a.* 697, 'Adamnanus ad Hiberniam pergit et dedit legem innocencium populis'. *ATig*, *s.a.* 697, 'Adhomnan tuc recht lecsa i n-Erind in bliadain-sea'.

[91] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer.

[92] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, ll. 521–24 (pp. 20–21); 'Law of Status or Franchise', trans. by MacNeill, p. 303. There is no direct translation of the Irish term *tuath*. It generally refers to a 'social structure or people', 'territorial unit or kingdom'. See *DIL*, 2012 T 348.

[93] *DIL*, 2012 C 570, 'visitation, tour, circuit'. See also Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 151.

ates the three requisitions that are proper for a king (to levy) on his *tuatha*, which include an *óenach*. However, the ordering of the *óenach* belonged to the *tuath*, and even though anything a king pledges for an *óenach* is his to decide, he must ensure that these pledges are proper and lawful. The three things that are listed as appropriate for a king to bind by pledge on his *tuatha* are a pledge for hostings, a pledge for *rechtge*, and a pledge for *cairddi*, for all these are benefits to a *tuath*:[94]

> Teora tomalta ata chórai do ríg for a thúaith(a): óenach 7 dál do chundruig 7 tochomrac do chrích. Is túaithe cammae comarggud óenaig; is ríg ní gellas for óenach, acht rop coir ní gellas. Cair: cis lir ata chóra[i] do ríg do giull for a thúatha? A trí. Cateat? Gell slógad, gell rechtge, gell cairddi; ar it l(i)essa túaithe huli insin.

> There are three requisitions that are proper for a king (to levy) on his *tuatha*, an assembly, and a convention for enforcing authority and a hosting to the border. The joint holding (?) of an assembly, however, belongs to the *tuath*. What a king pledges for an assembly is his (to decide), provided that the pledge he gives be a proper one. Question — How many things is it proper for a king to bind by pledge on his *tuatha*? Three. What are they? Pledge for hostings, pledge for government, pledge for treaty, for all these are benefits to a *tuath*.[95]

The fines imposed on those who violated the ecclesiastical laws were to be made payable to the community which instigated them. For example, *Cáin Adomnáin* stipulated that fines were to be made payable specifically to the 'munter Adomnáin/munter Iae' (community of Adomnán and Iona),[96] despite the fact that the guarantor list attests to the widespread endorsement of the *cáin*.[97] The bulk of the fine for every transgression covered by this law was payable within the jurisdiction where the crime took place. However, the community of Adomnán received a sizeable share of the 'profits': 'cumal forbaich do muntir Iae airm i n-ícatar secht cumula 7 lethchumal di leth secht cumal. Sé séuit for tríchoit sét, trí seúit for cóic sétaib' (a *cumal forbaich* to the community of Iona where seven *cumal*s are paid, and half a *cumal* from seven half-*cumal*s. Six *sét*s on thirty *sét*s, three *sét*s on five *sét*s).[98] The scope and amounts

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[94] For *cairde*, see below, chap. 6.

[95] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, ll. 502–08 (p. 20); 'Law of Status or Franchise', trans. by MacNeill, pp. 302–03.

[96] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer 42, 43, 44 (p. 28).

[97] See Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cain Adamnáin*'.

[98] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer, 43 (p. 28).

of these payments has been detailed by Thurneysen.[99] For example, 'Rith cana Adamnain co mile' (Adomnán's law ran to one thousand).[100]

In the later Middle Irish preface to *Cáin Adomnáin* we have a reference to the carrying about of relics for the purpose of exacting the *cáin* or tribute. The text states:

> Daratsat na ráthae cétna téora gáire bendagtan for cech banscáil dogénath ní ar muntir nAdamnán, cíamad meinic tístais a minda. Ech cech raithe dia mindaib don comarba corice in fothracud hi Ráid-Both,[101] acht as ó ríghnaib sein namá, co cumunc cecha mná chena.[102]

> The same guarantors gave three shouts of blessing on every woman who would do something for the community of Adomnán, however often his relics were to come: a horse every quarter to his relics, to his coarb, to be brought to the bath in Raphoe, but that is from queens only, all other women give what they are able.

Cáin Adomnáin shows huge jurisdictional power here and this was facilitated by cooperation from the secular authorities. Etchingham shows how laws such as this and *Cáin Fuithirbe* were underpinned by secular powers at formal synods or councils.[103] The relics or insignia of particular saints were often employed to lend authority to the promulgation of individual laws. Indeed, the earliest references to relic circuits in the annals are associated with the endorsement of laws.[104] When Adomnán's Law was renewed in 727 it was accompanied by relics to enforce the law and perhaps to ensure that this tribute was paid: 'Adomnani reliquie transferuntur in Hiberniam 7 Lex renouatur' (The relics of Adomnán are brought over to Ireland and the Law is promulgated anew).[105] The relics were returned in 730: 'Reuersio reliquiarum Adomnani de Hibernia

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[99] Thurneysen, 'Aus dem irischen Recht'.

[100] Thurneysen, 'Aus dem irischen Recht', pp. 383–84.

[101] *DIL*, 2012 F 396: *fothrucud*, 'bathing, bathing place'. This may reflect the fact that women were the ones who performed the service of bathing others. See Doherty, 'Hagiography as a Source', p. 311.

[102] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer, 23 (p. 12).

[103] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 196–98.

[104] For example, see *AU* under the following years: 727, 737, 744, 748, 753, 757, 767, 772, 778, 780.

[105] *AU, s.a.* 727. See also *ATig, s.a.* 727, 'Adomnání relique transferuntur in Iberniam et lex renouatur'. The relics were returned in 730: *AU, s.a.* 'Reuersio reliquiarum Adomnani de Hibernia mense Octimbris'.

mense Octimbris' (The return of the relics of Adomnán from Ireland in the month of October).[106] So, the relics were in Ireland for three years. This length of stay is understandable when one considers the vast number of churches that were associated with the *familia Columbae*.[107] The relics of Adomnán may have been used to reinstate a peace agreement between the Cenél Conaill and the Cenél Eogain. Traditionally enemies, the two peoples had come together in alliance through their mutual kinsman Adomnán. However, the *Annals of Ulster* record a return to hostilities in 727: 'Bellum Droma Fornocht inter genus Conaill 7 Eugain, ubi Flann m. Aurtaile 7 Snedgus Dergg nepos Mrachidi iugulati sunt' (The battle of Druim Fornocht between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain, wherein Flann son of Aurthaile and Snédgus Derg Ua Braichidi were killed). Apparently not linked by the annalist was the entry later in the same year regarding the arrival in Ireland of the relics of Adomnán and the renewal of the law. As mentioned by Lucius Gwynn, it seems likely that these two events were intimately connected.[108] The abbot of Iona at the time, and thus the man responsible for the initiative, was Cillíne (d. 752), credited with the epithet *drochtech* (bridgemaker):[109] 'Mors Cilleine Droctigh anchorite Ie' (death of Cillíne Bridgemaker, anchorite of Iona).[110] This appellation may refer to Cillíne's peace-making activities in which he used relics to great advantage. This is clearly enunciated in the preface to the Book of Leinster poem *Scrín Adomnáin* and is also found in the later *scholia* to both *Félire Óengusso* and the *Martyrology of Donegal*.[111] The song, which begins 'A maccucáin, sruith in tíag', contains a long list of saintly relics and is part of the so-called 'Isidore Leaves' of the twelfth-century manuscript.[112] Carney has dated it to the Old Irish period on linguistic grounds and makes a convincing argument that it was composed

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[106] *AU, s.a.* 730.

[107] For a thorough examination of the Columban federation, see Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*.

[108] Gwynn, 'The Reliquary of Adamnán', p. 199.

[109] *DIL*, 2012 D2 403.

[110] *AU, s.a.* 752. For full details on Cillíne, see Bourke, 'Cillíne Pontifex'. He argues that *droichthech* is also an Irish translation of *pontifex* — bishop. In Cillíne mac Dícolla, therefore, the office of bishop and abbot of Iona were combined. For another instance of this combination of roles, see Bourke, 'Fergna Epscop'.

[111] *Book of Leinster*, VI, 1684–86; *Félire*, 23 September, *scholia* (p. 210); *Martyrology of Donegal*, ed. by Todd and Reeves, pp. 184–85; Gwynn, 'The Reliquary of Adamnán'; Carney, 'A Maccucáin'.

[112] Carney, 'A Maccucáin', p. 26.

to exalt the merits and joys of learning and of exposition of the Gospels to a young scholar, burdened by his heavy satchel.[113] The preface credits the composition of the song to Adomnán and explains that Cillíne brought a shrine, containing all the relics collected together by Adomnán, over to Ireland in order to use these relics to broker a peace treaty:

> Ba hamra inti Adomnán. Ba mor serce mo Dia 7 mo chobnesom. Is lais ro tarclamtha in mórmartra noéb i n-oenscrín. Et is í in scrínsin dorat Cillini Droichthech m Dichlocha dochum hErenn do denam síd 7 attaig Cenel Conaill 7 Eogain. Is é in so lín na martra ut Adomnanus cecinit.

> Adomnán was a wonderful man. He was a great lover of his God and of his neighbour. It is he who collected the great holy relics in one shrine, and that is the shrine that Cillíne Droichthech son of Dichlocha brought to Ireland to make peace and friendship between Cenél Conaill and Cenél Eogain. This is the full list of the relics, which Adomnán sang.[114]

This preface may, therefore, be a later elaboration or explication of the events surrounding the use of relics to legitimize a peace agreement in 727, as suggested by the annalistic account and by Cillíne's epithet 'bridgemaker'.

Hughes argues that the enactment of *Cáin Adamnáin* is a clear indication of Iona's authority and pre-eminence over the Irish Church in the late seventh century.[115] However, a gloss on Colmán's Hymn suggests that in later centuries the Law of Patrick managed to gain jurisdiction over injuries to clerics (with the resultant fines), which the *Lex Innocentium* had exercised in 697.[116] For example, the *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 734 state that 'the relics of Peter, Paul, and Patrick were taken on tour to execute the law' (Commotatio martirum Petir 7 Phoil 7 Phatraicc ad legem perficiendam). It is possible that a further *Annals of Ulster* entry *s.a* 737 can be taken as an indication that these relics, like those of Adomnán, had also been brought on circuit for three years: 'Lex Patricii tenuit Hiberniam' (The Law of Patrick in force in Ireland).[117] These may have

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[113] Carney, 'A Maccucáin', p. 30.

[114] *Book of Leinster*, VI, 1684.

[115] Hughes, 'The Church and the World', p. 101.

[116] Hughes, 'The Church and the World', p. 101.

[117] This action may have been a result of the entry immediately preceding it, *s.a.* 737, recording a meeting between the king of Tara and the king of Munster at Terryglass: 'Dal itir Aedh n-Alddan 7 Cathal oc Tir da Glas' (A meeting between Áed Allán and Cathal at Terryglass). For further discussion, see Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, I, 210.

been the relics discussed by Tírechán and used by Armagh to justify dominion over the Irish Church as outlined in *Liber Angeli*.[118] The prominence that the annalists give to the *Lex Patricii* bolsters these claims to pre-eminence, as it was 'enforced' around the country in 783, 799, 806, 823, 825, and 842.[119]

Relics again accompanied the promulgation of the Law of Patrick in 811, because the annals record that the abbot of Armagh 'went to Connacht with Patrick's Law and his casket' (Nuadha, abbas Aird Machae, migrauit cu Chonnachta cum Lege Patricii 7 cum armario eius).[120] In the corresponding entry in *Chronicum Scotorum* it is recorded that Patrick's Law and *cáin* (not *armario*) were brought to Connacht: 'Nuada ab Aird Macha do dul i Conachta cum lege Patricii et cona cáin'. This may be an early witness to the evolution of the term *cáin* to mean payment or tribute, discussed above. Likewise, the *Annals of Ulster*'s record of the events in 836 included a reference to the imposition of Patrick's Law in Connacht, assisted by relics: 'Dermait do dul co Connachta cum lege 7 uexillis Patricii' (Diarmait went to Connachta with Patrick's Law and his 'banners'). The political context was of particular importance here. Indeed, there were issues of jurisdiction and power tied up in many instances of the promulgation of laws and the touring of relics, as will be examined in the next chapter.

Laws ascribed to other saints were also promulgated during this period.[121] For example, the *Annals of Ulster* notes the Law of the Descendants of Suanach in 743 and 748.[122] The Laws of Ciarán of Clonmacnoise and Brendan of Clonfert were simultaneously implemented in Connacht in 744.[123] Colmcille's Law was in Meath in 753, 757, and 778.[124] The Law of Commán and Aedán was promulgated in Connacht in 772 and 780.[125] Ailbe of Emly's Law was imposed

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[118] *LA*, 19 (p. 186). Discussed above, chap. 2.

[119] *AU, s.a.* 783, 799, 806, 823, 825, 842.

[120] See Etchingham's comments, *Church Organisation*, p. 201, that the use of the term *migrauit* here may indicate that Nuadu was in flight to Connacht subsequent to his installation at Armagh, implying a breach with Áed Oirdnide.

[121] For further details on these laws, see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 199–204.

[122] *AU, s.a.* 743: 'Lex nepotis Suanaigh'. *AU, s.a.* 748: 'Lex aui Suanaich for Leith Cuinn'.

[123] *AU, s.a.* 744: 'Lex Ciarani filii artificis 7 lex Brendani simul la Forggus m. Ceallaigh'.

[124] *AU, s.a.* 753: 'Lex Coluim Cille la Domnall Mide'. *AU, s.a.* 757: 'Lex Columbe Cille la Sleibene'. *AU, s.a.* 778: 'Lex Coluim Cille la Donnchad 7 Bresal'.

[125] *AU, s.a.* 772: 'Lex Comain 7 Aedain secunda for teora Connacht'. *AU, s.a.* 780: 'Lex tertia Commain 7 Aedhain incipit'.

in Munster in 784 according to the *Annals of Inisfallen* and in 793 according to the *Annals of Ulster*.[126] That of Ciarán of Clonmacnoise was imposed over Connacht in 788 and 814.[127] *Cáin Dar Í* was effected around various provinces in quick succession near the beginning of the ninth century.[128] It was brought to Munster in 810,[129] Connacht in 812 and 826,[130] and Ulster in 813.[131] Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this work to provide the context for each episode listed, as the focus here is only on specific references to the use of relics. However, an investigation of any one of these annal entries reveals the important role played by the patron saint in representing particular communities. For example, the *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 793 reports: 'Lex Comain la Aildobur 7 Muirghus for teora Connacht' (The Law of Commán by Aildobur and Muirgius in the three Connachta). This law is presented as belonging to the long-dead patron saint of Roscommon, Commán, but administered by the current abbot Aildobur and the king of the Connachta, Muirgius mac Tommaltaig.[132] Roscommon was one of the principal churches in Connacht, on the edge of Mag nAí, and Muirgius was of the Uí Briúin Aí, the ruling dynasty of the area. The promulgation of this law, therefore, was an expression of the hegemony of Mag nAí and its leaders the Uí Briúin Aí, and also of its own local saint, Commán.[133] This record shows that the promulgation of laws involved close contact between the secular and clerical elite. The references to laws in the annals also bring to light the intricacies of political alliances. For instance, Tipraite mac Taidg, king of the Connachta, clearly favoured Armagh as he promulgated the Law of Patrick with Dub dá Leithe, abbot of Armagh, in 783.[134]

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[126] *AI, s.a.* 784: 'Cáin Ailbi la Mumain'. *AU, s.a.* 793: 'Lex Ailbhi for Mumain 7 ordinatio Artroigh m. Cathail in regnum Mumen'. Note the ordination of Artri to the kingship of Munster in the same entry. For discussion, see Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, I, 256 n. 3.

[127] *AU, s.a.* 788: 'Lex Ciaraini for Connachta'. *AU, s.a.* 814: 'Lex Quiarani for Cruachna eleuata est la Muirghus'.

[128] For *Cáin Dar Í*, see Ó Riain, 'A Misunderstood Annal'.

[129] *AI, s.a.* 810: 'Bo Slechta la Mumain la Dare ocus la Adhuar macc n-Echin'. This law was also referred to as *Bóschlectae*, see Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c.* 800', pp. 583–84.

[130] *AU, s.a.* 812: 'Lex Darii for Connachtu'. *AU, s.a.* 826: 'Lex Dari co Connacta iterum'.

[131] *AU, s.a.* 813: 'Lex Darii la hU Neill'.

[132] For Muirgius mac Tommaltaig, see Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 251–53.

[133] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 561.

[134] *AU, s.a.* 783: 'Forus Chano Patricii hi Cruachnibh la Dub da Leithi 7 la Tipraiti filium Taidhgg'.

This could be interpreted as a reflection of Tipraite's endeavours to follow an independent ecclesiastical policy. Charles-Edwards demonstrates that the alternation between Iona and Armagh as the favoured church of the Uí Néill was due to the alternation between Clann Cholmáin and Cenél nÉogain kings of Tara.[135] Indeed, the promulgation of the Law of Columcille in 753 and 778 reveals that the close links between Clann Cholmain and the Columban community long predated the building of the monastery of Kells.[136] The promulgation of these laws, especially when accompanied by relics, may have been designed to make a great impression on the general population.[137] The laconic annal records hint at the ceremony and spectacle of these occasions, in which influential abbots or bishops, supported by the secular rulers, would have paraded the relics of the saints.

Relic Circuits

The publicizing of laws and the circuit of relics were closely connected. They were often simultaneous and sprang out of the same need to impose rule and exact duties. The circuit of relics also had the less mercenary benefit of providing tangible comfort to believers, and of maintaining visibility and familiarity between the saint and the community. The circuit of relics combines two of the key elements intrinsic to the success of the cult of relics — faith and authority. For the relics of a particular saint to contain any real power and longevity lay Christians needed to believe in their intercessory power. However, the relics also needed to be an effective resource for the church and secular elite and to be adequately promoted. The appeal of the intercessory power of relics is evocatively described in the *Vita Columbae*, when a devastating famine was prevented through rain received via the intercession of Columba.[138] The episode is drawn from Gregory the Great's account in his *Dialogues* of the cloak of St Eutychius being carried through the fields of Lombardy during a drought.[139]

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[135] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 563. For the alliance between the Cenél nÉogain and Armagh in the eighth and ninth centuries, see Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 63–67.

[136] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 501; *AU*, *s.a.* 753: 'Lex Coluim Cille la Domnall Mide'. *AU*, *s.a.* 778: 'Lex Coluim Cille la Donnchad 7 Bresal'.

[137] Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c.* 800', p. 584.

[138] *VSC*, ɪɪ, 44 (p. 172).

[139] Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum*, ed. by Migne, ɪɪɪ, 15, discussed in Clancy, 'Columba,

Most significant here is the manner in which Columba's intervention is sought — they circumambulated a newly sowed, but parched, land three times holding aloft the relics of Columba:

> Hoc inito consilio fieri consiliati sumus, ut aliqui ex nostrís senioribus nuper aratum et seminatum campum cum sancti Columbae candida circumirent tunica, et librís stilo ipsius discriptís, leuarentque in aere et excuterent eandem per ter tunicam qua etiam hora exitus eius de carne indutus erat [...] Et sitiens prius terra satis satiata oportune germina produxit sua, et ualde laetas eodem anno segites.

> We formed a plan, and decided upon this course: that some of our elders should go round the plain that had been lately ploughed and sown, taking with them the white tunic of Saint Columba, and books in his own handwriting; and should three times raise and shake in the air that tunic which he wore in the hour of his departure from the flesh [...] And the earth, previously parched, was well watered, and produced its crop in season, and a very plentiful harvest in that same year.[140]

The prevalence of a phenomenon that was common in the eighth century, the *commotatio reliquiarum* or *martirum*, may have resulted from the type of practice described by Adomnán and Gregory. As detailed above (Chapter 3), there are disagreements as to how this term should be translated into English. Nevertheless, it is most likely that *commotatio* refers to a tour or circuit. As will be shown, the political contexts of each circuit generally correspond with this supposition. Like the circuit of Columba's relics around the barren land on Iona, the timing of these *commotationes* sometimes coincided with outbreaks of disease or natural disasters. For example, the record of the *commotatio* of the relics of Trian in 743 in the *Annals of Ulster* is immediately followed by the record of a smallpox outbreak: 'Comotatio martirum Treno Cille Deilgge, 7 in bolgach'. The taking on tour of the relics of Erc and Finnian in 776 was performed during a fifteen-year stretch when many died from the *riuth fola* ('bloody flux', dysentery?).[141] Furthermore, the circuit of Ultán's relics in 785 occurred during a prolonged period when a pestilence referred to as 'scamach'

Adomnán and the Cult of Saints in Scotland', p. 15. The influence of Gregory's *Dialogues* on Adomnán is well appreciated. See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, pp. 137–38; O'Loughlin, 'Library of Iona', p. 41.

[140] *VSC*, II, 44 (pp. 172–73).

[141] *AU*, *s.a.* 764, 'riuth fola'; *s.a.* 768, 770, 773, 774, 'fluxu sanguinis'; *s.a.* 777, 778, 'riuth fola'. For an identification of these diseases, see MacArthur, 'Identification of Pestilences'; Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, II, 183.

was prevalent.[142] Accordingly, these relics may have been taken on tour to provide the community with a tangible expression of hope, faith, and consolation. *Córus Béscnai* suggests that '.x.mada 7 primite 7 almsana' (tithes and first-fruits and alms) comprise an effective preventative measure against plague and war.[143] This is reiterated in *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, which prescribes 'almsanna o cach di cach torad' (alms from everybody of every produce) as a remedy to the three hardest afflictions in the world — famine, slaughter, and plague.[144]

There are also references in the early ninth century to the *tocbáil* of relics, which can mean 'the act of elevating, exposing, building, upholding or exalting'.[145] In 816, the 'tocbáil' of the shrine of Mo Chutu is recorded.[146] Similarly, in 819 the *Annals of Ulster* note 'Cengciges Airdd Machae cen aigi cen tucbail scrine, 7 cumusc ann i torchair m. Echdach m. Fiachnae'. This phrase has been variously translated. Mac Airt renders the entry as 'At Ard Macha Whitsun was not celebrated nor the shrine taken on tour; and there was a disturbance in which the son of Echaid son of Fiachna fell'.[147] Charles-Edwards and Hennessy seem nearer the original meaning of the entry with their translation of 'cen tucbail scrine' as 'the shrine was not elevated'.[148] Contextually, 'exhibition' would perhaps provide the most appropriate term in English. Both annalistic entries describe occasions when the shrines of the saints were displayed within the church or the immediate surrounding area for the veneration of the congregation. They were possibly moved from their usual protected location and raised up on shoulders and carried in a procession around the church on feast days — analogous to a modern Corpus Christi procession. Indeed, a conceivable comparison would be the yearly parade and exhibition of the relics of Irish saints Kilian, Totnan, and Colonat, in Würzburg, Lower Franconia, Germany. On St Kilian's feast day (8 July), the glass case containing the three skulls of the saints is removed from the Neumünster church crypt, paraded through the

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[142] *AU, s.a.* 783, 'Scamhach'; *s.a.* 786, 'Pestis que dicitur scamach'. This disease was possibly bovine tuberculosis or pneumonia; see Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, p. 197.

[143] *CIH*, ii, 522.33–35.

[144] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, pp. 231.24–25, 29–31; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 243.

[145] *DIL*, 2012 T 201.

[146] *AI, s.a.* 816.

[147] *AU*, ed. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, p. 277.

[148] Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, i, 278; *Annals of Ulster*, ed. by Hennessy, p. 313.

streets before large crowds, and put on display in the cathedral.[149] The term *commotatio* is used by Honoratus to describe comparable ceremonies in pagan temples on feast days, including the practice of moving around statues.[150]

Relic circuits provided an opportunity for the collection of revenue and tributes for the Church. The extent to which this was the primary objective of these circuits has been a matter of debate. A proponent for the mercenary motives of these circuits, Ó Briain remarked that as early as 'the eighth century the practice seems to have deteriorated into a mere expedient for replenishing the coffers of the king and his monastic relatives'.[151] He is equally cynical about the purpose of hagiography.[152] His scepticism has been criticized and refuted,[153] especially by Hughes, who argues that at this relatively early period the circuit of relics and the associated promulgation of laws arose from a genuine concern for the well-being of the population at a time of undoubted difficulty and hardship.[154] Indeed, the *Hibernensis*, citing Augustine, includes the increase in the evils in society as one of the reasons for the changing about or translating of relics.[155] Additionally, the *Hibernensis*, following Isidore, criticizes vagrant monks (*circumcelliones*), some of whom profit from the sale of relics: 'alii membra martyrum venditant' (others who sell martyr's limbs).[156]

However, despite some exaggeration on the part of Ó Briain, revenue collection was an important facet of these tours.[157] While the timing of some relic circuits coincided with famines or the outbreak of disease, some of the most devastating plagues are recorded in the annals with no obvious connection to relics. For example, the annalistic references to Justinian's Plague in 549 and the 'mortalitas magna' of 664 are accompanied by no references to the use of relics.[158] Furthermore, the early Irish law texts *Cóic Conara Fugill* and

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[149] For this cult, see *Passio Sancti Kiliani Episcopi*, ed. by Krusch and Levison; Ó Riain-Raedel, 'Kilian'; Ó Fiaich, 'St. Kilian'; Breatnach, 'Irish Churchmen in Pre-Carolingian Europe'.

[150] Doherty, 'Use of Relics', p. 96 n. 40.

[151] Ó Briain, 'Hagiography of Leinster', p. 457.

[152] Ó Briain, 'Hagiography of Leinster', p. 463.

[153] See, for example, Doherty, 'Use of Relics', p. 96; Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c*. 800', p. 584.

[154] Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 168–69.

[155] *Hibernensis*, 49.8 (p. 206).

[156] *Hibernensis*, 39.3 (p. 148).

[157] See Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 5.3 for an overview of relic circuits and the related uses of relics.

[158] Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade', p. 71; Doherty, 'Use of Relics', p. 96.

Berrad Airechta both make reference to the 'tuillem menistrech' (earnings of a reliquary).[159] The latter lists 'tuillem mbathas no meinistrech' (fee for baptism or for reliquaries) among 'da ruidlesa tuaithe la' (the transactions within the tribe [which are] entirely immune from claim).[160] That is, once a donation has been made the donor has no subsequent claim on the payment — it is absolutely forfeit.[161] The Heptads includes 'tuillem meinistri',[162] among its list of the 'Tait .uii. fod la nadcon toibget athgabala' (seven rights that cannot be recovered by distraint).[163] The phrase 'tuillem meinistri' is glossed as follows: '.i. log ar comairce don minn .i. imtuillit na minna bitt for aister .i. do .x.maduib 7 primittib 7 almsanaib' (i.e. pay for protection by the relic, i.e. which is earned by the relics that are carried about, i.e. of tithes and first fruits and alms).[164] A deconstruction of this gloss provides insights into the concrete uses of relics in medieval Ireland. Firstly, it indicates that a *meinistir* carried relics (*minna*). Secondly, it explains that payment was received in return for protection provided by these relics. And finally, it clarifies that these relics were indeed taken on tour in order to exact these tributes and provide the protection. While the formation 'minna [...] aistir' may have been an attempt on the part of the glossator to give the term an Irish etymology, the context known to him clearly suggested that this was a plausible explanation. *Meinistir* is also glossed as *minna aistir*, 'journey relics', in one manuscript of the *Vita Tripartita*.[165]

The persistence of the practice of collecting money on circuits is reflected in the semantic evolution of the term *cúairt*, which by the later Middle Ages came to mean quite simply 'tribute'.[166] For instance, in the later life *Betha Colmáin mac Lúachain* the saint is portrayed as making a covenant with the king of Offaly in which the saint received a tribute in return for his favour and patronage: 'rocind immurgu cuairt do-som uáid fein .i. ó Chinae[th] 7 o c[h]ach ina diaid co brath .i. screball cecha cathrig'na t[h]ír...' (However, a tribute was fixed

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[159] *Cóic Conara Fugill*, ed. by Thurneysen, 16, 127 (pp. 21, 55); *CIH*, ɪɪ, 591.9–13.

[160] *CIH*, ɪɪ, 591.9–13; 'Berrad Airechta', ed. by Stacey, p. 210.

[161] Unless the priest has given it to the old woman (*caillech*) or to a son born to him after he entered the priesthood. See *CIH*, ɪɪ, 591.30–31; 'Berrad Airechta', ed. by Stacey, 8 (p. 211).

[162] *CIH*, ɪ, 40.10.

[163] *CIH*, ɪ, 39.30.

[164] *CIH*, ɪ, 40.13–14.

[165] See Stokes, *Tripartite Life*, ɪ, p. lv.

[166] *DIL*, 2012 C 570, 'visitation, tour, circuit'. See also Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 151.

for him from Cinaed and each one after him until Doom, viz., a scruple for every adult in the land).[167] Similarly, the later Latin *Life of Ciarán of Saigir* is witness to the use of bells for exacting tributes:

> Veniens sanctus Kyaranus in Hyberniam, Deus direxit eum ad fontem Fuaran, et ibi ilico cymbalum viri Dei aperta uoce lucide clamauit, quod cymbalum barthanus Kyarani uocatur, et habetur cum magno honore in ciuitate et in tota parrochia sancti Kyarani. Ducitur enim per regiones ad coniuraciones principum, ad defensionem pauperum et ad exactionem tributorum monasterii sancti Kyarani.[168]

> On the coming of St Ciarán to Ireland, God guided him to the well of Fuarán. And there in that place the bell of the man of God cried out in a clear lucid voice so that this bell is called the 'barthan' of Ciarán. And it is held in great honour in the city and throughout the *paruchia* of St Ciarán for it is brought throughout the territories for the taking of oaths by the chiefs, for the defence of the poor, and for the exaction of tribute to the monastery of St Ciarán.

The revenue collecting aspect of relic circuits is also attested in contemporary texts from the Continent. Herrmann-Mascard interprets this as a negative, exploitative practice, arguing that the clergy took advantage of the voluntary contributions of the faithful to the shrines of the saints by taking relics on tour, directly to the people, in order to raise more money.[169] However, the upkeep of monasteries was costly and relic circuits generated vital income. This is especially true of the later Middle Ages when large amounts of capital were needed for renovation or construction.[170] Moreover, income was needed to feed the poor and the sick and to care for unwanted children and the marginalized in society.

These visitations or circuits were also used to realize jurisdictional rights. The *commotatio reliquiarum* is likely to be associated with the 'cúairt érlama' (the circuit of the patron saint) referred to as ancient practice in glosses on *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*: 'sendliged .i. cuaird erlama no dliged flatha' (Old law i.e. the visit of an *érlam* or the law of the lord).[171] This is attested in the *Vita Sancti Carthagi*, possibly dating to the eighth century, in which the saint (popularly known as Mochuda) is endowed by the leader of the Déisi (*dux na n-Desi*)

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[167] *Betha Colmáin*, ed. and trans. by Meyer, 87 (pp. 88–89).

[168] *Vita Sancti Ciarani de Saigir*, ed. by Plummer, 4 (p. 218).

[169] Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques*, p. 296.

[170] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 21–22.

[171] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, p. 231.9, 12.

with the church of Ardfinnan.[172] This church is described as having a 'large *paruchia* within its circuit in honour of St Mochuda' (cum maxima parrochia in circuitu in honore sancti Mochudu).[173] In the *Vita Ruadani* the saint is similarly honoured: 'Tunc plebs illa, gratias agentes Deo, obtulerunt Rodano ipsam civitatem et gentem que est in circuitu illius' (the local public, giving thanks to God, offered the Rodanus the city including all within its circuit).[174] This has important implications for the role of the term *paruchia* and how it fits in with the models of jurisdiction in early Ireland defined by Etchingham.[175] An early Irish gloss confirms the association between *cúairt* and *paruchia* in a remark on a section in Ephesians concerning the seating of Christ at the right hand of the Father.[176] The Irish annotator commented that 'nifarcuairt parche docoid' (he had not set off on a circuit of a *pairche*).[177] Significantly, the biblical context here is of jurisdictional power and dominion.[178] Furthermore, the only mention of the term *paruchia* in the annals represents it as an area in which a visitation or tour takes place:[179] 'Dubh da Bhairenn, abbas Cluana Iraird, aduisitauit paruchiam crichae Muman' (Dub dá Bairenn, abbot of Clonard, visited the *paruchia* in the territory of Mumu).[180] This entry has added meaning against the political backdrop of the Clonard abbacy at this time. In 775 the community of Clonard was involved in a conflict with the king of Mide, Donnchad: 'Imairecc i Cluain Irairdd iter Donnchad 7 muintir Cluana Iraird' (A battle in Clonard between Donnchad and the *familia* of Clonard).[181] It seems that Donnchad attacked the monastery as part of his tumultuous relationship with the Leinstermen, which ultimately allowed his dynasty, the Clann Cholmáin,

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[172] Sharpe, 'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*', p. 79; Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 385, 396. For dating, see also Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 471.

[173] *Vita Sancti Carthagi*, ed. by Plummer, 62 (p. 195).

[174] *Vita S. Ruadani*, ed. by Heist, 6 (p. 161). Part of the 'O'Donohue' group of Latin lives dated by Sharpe (*Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, p. 334) to earlier than 800, and by Carey ('Review', pp. 260–62) to the Middle Irish Period.

[175] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, 4.1 and pp. 215–17.

[176] Ephesians 1. 20.

[177] *Thes. Pal.*, I, 632, ll. 23–24. For alternative translations, see *Thes. Pal.*, I, 632, ll. 38–39; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 215.

[178] Ephesians 1. 19–23.

[179] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 215.

[180] *AU, s.a.* 787.

[181] *AU, s.a.* 775.

to consolidate their control of the midlands. After this point we see the increasing influence of Donnchad in the abbacy of Clonard, including the insertion of his kinsman Dub dá Bairenn. In 787, therefore, Dub dá Bairenn appears to have been visiting the churches and other property subject to Clonard. Conflict with the Munstermen was a frequent feature of Donnchad Midi's reign. He first campaigned against Munster in 775,[182] the same year that he appears to have brought Clonard under his control. He attacked the province again in 776, with the help of the forces of Durrow.[183] Indeed, Donnchad's last recorded campaign was against Munster, in 794.[184] The visit of Dub dá Bairenn, therefore, could be interpreted as the ecclesiastical counterpoint to the military manoeuvres — the dual forces of temporal and spiritual power being combined to assert authority over the Munstermen.

While *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid* enshrines the importance of the *cúairt érlama*, the text also implies that a lord was relied upon to collect ecclesiastical dues from his subjects: 'Cisne .iii. haimsera inad apail a torad ar cach flaith combe dithle ith 7 blicht 7 meas Taithmeach nudburta saerad fuidre fuaslugad .x.mad, fuaslucad do mogaib' (What are the three occasions when failure of produce afflicts each lord, so that there is destruction of corn and milk and mast? Reversion of donations, freeing semi-freemen, release from tithes, release for slaves).[185] From this evidence we can observe the role of relics in the relationship between church and society in early medieval Ireland, in which the provision of pastoral services in return for the payment of dues was an important feature.[186] Whether pastoral care was to be administered to the community at large or only to monastic clients is up for debate.[187] However, an investigation into the relationship between the Church and secular leaders indicates that the collection of church dues was an area in which they worked closely together. A commentary on *Uraicecht Becc* mentions that the 'flaith' (lord) 'do[beir] primidi 7 dechmadha 7 almsana dun eclais' (brings first fruits and tithes and

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[182] *AU, s.a.* 775.

[183] *AU, s.a.* 776.

[184] *AU, s.a.* 794.

[185] *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid*, pp. 231.15–17.

[186] See Etchingham, 'Pastoral Care and Dues'.

[187] For this debate, see Sharpe, 'Churches and Communities'; Etchingham, 'Pastoral Care and Dues'; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 239–89; Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c*. 800', pp. 601–05; Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, pp. 225–33.

alms to the church).[188] As we have seen above, another legal gloss describes these same dues as constituting the 'tuillem meinistri'.[189] Perhaps, therefore, these payments were collected by the secular lords on behalf of the Church.

It seems, then, that relic circuits were also clearly related to visits of inspection by the abbots of various organizations, in which communities renewed their adherence to the laws of the *paruchia* and paid tribute to the abbot. This connection between relics, episcopal visits, and the maintenance of a jurisdiction will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. In particular, it will be shown how this schema is devised in the *Liber Angeli*, which lays out the jurisdictional rights of Armagh and defines the respect and value due in terms of the insignia of Patrick. We have seen that relics were more than just holy items to be revered by the faithful, they were administrative tools used in the day-to-day running of the Church. As official insignia relics were present at the making of agreements and swearing of oaths, and were taken on tour to promote the cult of a particular saint, seek intercession, and exact tribute for his church. The annals abound with examples of the presence of relics at assemblies and agreements, and the next chapter will show that it was clearly gross misconduct to violate any such concords.

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[188] *CIH*, v, 1592.35–36.

[189] *CIH*, i, 40.10; Etchingham, 'Pastoral Care and Dues', pp. 116–18.

Relics and Identity — Power and Control in Early Medieval Ireland

I n Late Antiquity relics were used as diplomatic gifts to facilitate the nurturing of relationships and alliances, creating a social as well as geographical network of solidarity, obligation, and reciprocity.[1] The use of relics in church and secular politics became a key feature of the cult of relics throughout the medieval era, as well as into the early modern and modern periods. In the Middle Ages the circulation of relics bridged distances and differences between territories, expedited the creation of military networks, and smoothed relations between princes.[2] In early medieval Ireland, it was this evolution of relics into insignia and official emblems that became a useful tool at the Church's disposal in its interaction with lay society and the secular elite. In this way relics became locked into the identity of each religious community and played a role in the dealings of the Church both internally and externally. Continuing on from the last chapter, the political aspects of the cult of relics will be examined here. It will be shown that the cult of relics was used by churches and communities to legitimize and enhance, and to attain power and authority. Scholarly analysis of the cult of the saints is ever evolving, with some academics viewing it as deeply self-serving for elites, who deliberately promoted it to advance their own political position.[3] In order to fully understand the role of the cult of relics, therefore, we must first appreciate the importance of local and national saints to their communities.

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[1] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 89–90.

[2] Rollason, 'Relic-Cults as an Instrument of Royal Policy', pp. 93–96.

[3] Hayward, 'Demystifying the Role of Sanctity', pp. 140–42.

The Patron Saint

Part of the authority of relics, both corporeal and non-corporeal, and the respect they commanded amongst the community at large was their purported ability to accommodate a direct relationship with the saint, and through him with God. The tangibility of relics ensured the appeal of the cult, compared to some of the more abstract elements of Christianity.[4] Even in the early days of Christianity, mere decades after the death of Christ, God was sometimes considered too distant to be reached directly by believers and play an active part in their daily lives.[5] The rise in popularity, initially of the holy man, and later of the saint, was a reflection of a desire to bridge this gap and facilitate communication with the divine.[6] Proximity here was key. Saints had grown closer to Christ through death and this intimacy could be shared with those on earth who nurtured relationships with the saints. Local saints were particularly vital to this process as they represented a particular area and fought on the behalf of their community and acted as protectors. These saints were real individuals who shared common characteristics, and often a common ancestry, with local people.[7] Each saint had his or her place within the pantheon of saints. If a particular monastery became more successful, perhaps via secular patronage, its saint had likewise to reflect this status. Hence, we can often see the later reworking or elaboration of a saint's cult to enhance his or her career and ancestry.

In Cummian's letter on the paschal controversy he lists the elder statesmen of the Irish Church, with whom he is corresponding, as heirs of saints rather than leaders of communities. These authoritative ecclesiastics are dubbed 'successores uidelicet nostrorum patrum priorum Ailbei episcopi, Quera<ni C>oloniensis, Brendani, Nessani, Lugidi' (the successors of our first fathers: of Bishop Ailbe, of Ciarán of Clonmacnoise, of Brendan, of Nessan, and of Lugid).[8] He addresses Abbot Ségéne of Iona as 'abb<ati, Co>lumbae sancti et caeter<or>um' (successor of holy Columba and of other holy men).[9] We

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[4] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 33–35.

[5] For a brief overview, see Howard-Johnston, 'Introduction'.

[6] See Brown, 'Holy Man'; Cameron, 'On Defining the Holy Man'.

[7] For example, see Charles-Edwards, 'Saints' Cults'; Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints'; Doherty, 'Macartan'.

[8] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, ll. 260–62 (pp. 90–91).

[9] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, ll. 1–2 (pp. 56–57).

can see here that the leaders of the Irish Church in the seventh century were being defined according to their relationships with past saints.[10] This is also reflected in the Irish language. The head of a monastic community in Ireland from the ninth century onwards was often termed the *comarbae* (later *coarb*), which meant heir or successor.[11] In the secular sphere the term was used in legal texts on inheritance in the traditional sense of an heir to property and wealth.[12] In this way, ecclesiastical leaders were often not just abbots or bishops but the holders of the office established by the founding saint. It would appear by this time, therefore, that Irish clerics had a keen appreciation of the benefits to be derived from a deployment of sanctity for the purposes of advocacy.[13] Indeed, Bannerman has shown that the emphasis was more often on the title of the office that had been initiated by the saint, rather than the current location of the office holder. For example, the abbot of Kells was considered to be the *comarbae Coluim Cille* from the mid-ninth century until the mid-twelfth, even though Columba had not founded that monastery himself.[14] This position would have been represented physically by possession of the insignia of the saint, as discussed below.

The identity of the community was defined by its relationship with the patron or founder saint, the *érlam*, who was thought to act as patron of a particular lineage, usually that of which he was himself a member. He was likely, though not always, to have founded the principal church of that lineage and to lie in its cemetery. Etchingham shows that the *érlam* might also be represented by a local interest, or alternatively by that of a superior or 'mother-church'.[15] As patron, it was he after whom new churches founded by that lineage were named. The origins of the idea of the *érlam* are unclear. It appears to be a pre-Christian term originally meaning 'tutelar deity' and was perhaps one of the native terms that were incorporated into the language of the Irish Church, as proposed by Binchy in 1962. He argued that terms such as *Dia* 'God', *cretem* 'belief', *ires* 'faith', *crábud* 'piety', and *érlam* 'patron saint', were sufficient, at the outset, to

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[10] Charles-Edwards, 'Saints' Cults', p. 173.

[11] *DIL*, 2012 C 352. For the coarbs of Columba, Finnian, and Ciarán, see Bannerman, '*Comarba Coluim Cille*'; Byrne, 'St. Finnian of Clonard'; Byrne, 'The Community of Clonard'; Ryan, 'Abbatial Succession at Clonmacnois'.

[12] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 102–05.

[13] Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies', p. 239.

[14] Bannerman, '*Comarba Coluim Cille*', pp. 18, 29–35.

[15] Etchingham, 'Implications of *Paruchia*', esp. p. 157.

provide a 'skeleton service' of Christian terminology.[16] There are also instances of secular *érlama* whose role in early Irish law was to prescribe a period after which the kingship was to pass to another branch of the kindred. The *érlam* who regulated the succession to kingship need not necessarily have been a saint but the common ancestor of the lineages that shared the kingship.[17] Similarly, as suggested by Ó Riain, 'it was the saint's role as source of ecclesiastical title that introduced the term *érlam* to the vocabulary of the early Irish church' in the first place.[18] A commentary on succession to the abbacy in the law tract *Córus Béscnai* dictates that the family of the patron saint held the right of succession to the highest ecclesiastical office in the 'eacluis fine erluma'.[19] It was, therefore, clearly important to record the *érlam*'s pedigree. This legal relationship between the 'founder-saint' and ecclesiastical lineage was expressed in the naming of churches after the *érlam*,[20] thereby offering strong resistance to any influx of dedications to non-Irish saints.[21] According to Charles-Edwards the typical *érlam* had five characteristics: he was heavenly patron of the community attached to his church; he participated in the foundation of the church; he decided upon the rule of the community; he is buried in the church cemetery; he will represent others buried in the same cemetery on Judgement Day.[22]

Córus Béscnai provides some key information on the jurisdiction of the *érlam*. It advises that 'Muna tainic damna apad d'fine erluma ɫ griain ɫ manuch, annoit da gabail isin .iiii. luc' (if a suitable candidate for the abbacy has not come from the kin of the patron, or of the original landowner, or of the monastic tenants, the *andóit* is to take it in the fourth place).[23] This is not to be taken to mean that the *fine érlama*, 'the kin of the patron', was not attached to the *andóit*, but rather that, on failing to find a suitable candidate from the kin of the patron and the other two kins, the abbacy would fall to the other members of the *andóit*.[24] The *andóit* is defined as a church which has a special connec-

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[16] Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers', p. 166.

[17] Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam', p. 281.

[18] Ó Riain, 'Conservation in the Vocabulary', p. 360.

[19] *CIH*, v, 1820.8–23.

[20] *Érlama* were not always founders, for example Colmán Elo. See Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam', p. 287.

[21] Ó Riain, 'Conservation in the Vocabulary', p. 360.

[22] Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam', p. 290.

[23] *CIH*, v, 1820.16; trans. in *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, ed. by Breatnach, p. 26.

[24] *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, ed. by Breatnach, p. 26.

tion with a patron saint and from which others have been founded.[25] There are some philological disagreements as to whether the term ultimately derives from Latin *antiquitas*, 'ancient foundation'.[26] However, it is clearly a word that indicates the antiquity of a church.[27] Given the use of the term in the Irish material, Etchingham proposes the more nuanced 'mother-church' as a translation of *andóit*.[28] He shows that the distinction between the 'mother-church', or *andóit*, and the kin of the local founding or patron saint was in some cases quite real.[29] Again, this term *andóit* is associated in the laws with the *érlam*: 'annoit .i. a mbi taisi inn erloma' (*annoit* i.e. in which are the relics of the patron).[30] Elsewhere in *Córus Béscnai andóit* is glossed simply as *fine erlama* (the kin of the patron).[31]

The role of the *érlam* was, therefore, integral to the system of clientship and patronage in early Ireland. This relationship could be expressed and nurtured through the veneration of relics. The various communities and kingdoms in early Ireland had their own allegiances to particular saints. The Christian *érlam* may have replaced a pagan tribal ancestor and, therefore, his role as patron of a particular kindred (his *fine érlama*) who controlled a church may explain the abundance of saints' genealogies in Ireland.[32] The huge size of the corpus of written saints' genealogies is unique to Ireland and may reflect this Irish concern with preserving hereditary and legal rights to property and ecclesiastical office.[33] Individual case studies, such as Doherty's analysis of Clogher and the cult of Macartan, show the special relationship between saint and people.[34] Similarly, Elva Johnston elucidates how this affiliation often took on political importance since saints represented their communities' interests, especially in the shifting territorial boundaries of the late seventh and early eighth centuries.[35] For instance, Íte is portrayed as patron and matron of the Uí Chonaill,

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[25] *DIL*, 2012 A 334.

[26] McManus, 'Latin Loan-Words', pp. 61, 66.

[27] Sharpe, 'Churches and Communities', p. 93; Haggart, '*Céli Dé*', pp. 48–50. For further discussion of *andóit*, see also Macdonald, 'Annat in Scotland'; Clancy, 'Annat in Scotland'.

[28] Etchingham, 'Implications of *Paruchia*', p. 154.

[29] Etchingham, 'Implications of *Paruchia*', pp. 157–61.

[30] *CIH*, III, 979.17.

[31] *CIH*, III, 530.13.

[32] Ó Riain, 'Conservation in the Vocabulary', p. 360.

[33] See *Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. by Ó Riain.

[34] Doherty, 'Macartan', pp. 47–54.

[35] Johnston, 'Íte: Patron of her People', pp. 423–25.

fiercely defending her people against West Munster.[36] The veneration and pro-
motion of the relics and cults of these founders were hugely important, and
were manifested in the erection of shrines and the layout of church sites to
accommodate pilgrims. Archaeologists attest to a multiplicity of saints com-
memorated at certain early ecclesiastical sites.[37] These were possibly the heirs of
the original founding saint.

The personality of the living founder often influenced the identity of the
monastery for centuries. For example, Finnian's fame as a distinguished scholar
enhanced Clonard's reputation as one of the foremost schools in Ireland. By the
ninth century a clear academic tradition had developed. This is indicated by a
poem in a ninth-century manuscript in Karlsruhe on the scholars of Clonard,
attributed to Sedulius Scottus, which reiterates the growing scholastic fame of
Clonard at this time.[38] In this poem he pays tribute to the tradition of learn-
ing established at the monastic school of Clonard and to three of its scholars
in particular — Finnian, Ailerán, and an anonymous Fergus, whom Ó Cróinín
claims was a travelling companion of Sedulius.[39] According to data compiled
by Johnston, Clonard was third only to the larger Churches of Armagh and
Clonmacnoise as a centre of monastic learning for the period 797 to 1002.[40]

Similarly, Erc's community of Slane clearly identified with and promoted
their association with his renown as a lawyer. The annals record his death in
513, naming him bishop of Slane: 'Quies Erci episcopi Slane'.[41] The *Annals of
Tigernach* and *Chronicum Scotorum* add that he died aged ninety, and a later
insertion in Irish verse records his reputation as an arbiter of justice: 'Quies
Earc espuic Slaine .x.c. anno etatis sue, de quo Patricius ait: Espoc Erc cach
ní co n-dernadh ba cert, cach aen beres cocair cert fort-beir bendacht easpoc
Earc' (The rest of Erc bishop of Slaine in the ninetieth year of his age, of whom
Patrick said: Bishop Erc, whatever he would do was right. Whoever delivers

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[36] Many other scholars have examined saints and their kingdoms. For example, see
Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints'; Bonner and others, *Saint Cuthbert*. In general, see *Local
Saints and Local Churches*, ed. by Thacker and Sharpe, for the intimate association between
saints and territories. The essays by Charles-Edwards, Ó Riain, Padel, Clancy, and Blair are of
particular interest here.

[37] White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan*, p. 61.

[38] Howlett, *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style*, p. 129.

[39] Ó Cróinín, 'Who was Palladius?', p. 236. There is also a Fergus *sapiens* of Clonard
recorded at *AU, s.a.* 783.

[40] See Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, Appendix.

[41] *AU, s.a.* 513.

a just assessment Bishop Erc confers a blessing on him).[42] Furthermore, the *Annals of the Four Masters* describe him as Patrick's sweet spoken judge.[43] The Patrician material is our most fruitful resource on Erc, and Muirchú and Tírechán provide our earliest references in the seventh century.[44] Both recorded Erc's first encounter with Patrick at Tara. Erc was in the retinue of the pagan king Lóeguire, most likely in the capacity of judge or legal advisor. In the confrontation between the king and the saint over the lighting of the paschal fire at Slane, Erc was the only man who ignored the command of the druids and stood up before Patrick: 'Illi non surrexerunt in aduentu eius, sed unus tantum a Domino adiutus qui noluit oboedire dictis magorum, hoc est Ercc filius Dego' (They did not rise at his coming; there was only one man who, with the help of the Lord, refused to obey the commands of the druids, that is Ercc, son of Daig).[45] Subsequently, Erc was baptized by Patrick and entered his household: 'Sanctus quoque dixit: "Si babtisma Domini accipies, quod mecum est?" Respondit: "Accipiam"' (The holy man also said: 'Will you receive the baptism of my lord, which I bring with me?' He answered: 'I will receive it').[46] Despite the fact that Erc is associated with numerous different localities in the historical sources, he is remembered as patron of Slane — arguably due to his burial there.[47] This shows just how important the location of the bodily remains was in the cult of a saint. Possibly due partly to Erc's fame as a judge, Slane became known as one of the most important legal centres in Ireland.[48] Indeed, the *Triads* refer to Slane as 'Brethemnas Hérenn' (The Judgement of Ireland).[49] Slane's promotion of the relic cult of Erc is evident in the slab shrine of the saint, prominent in the cemetery at Slane — a rare example of such a shrine in Ireland not located on the west coast. Furthermore, Muirchú records that his relics were still venerated in Slane in his day: 'Ercc filius Dego, cuius nunc

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[42] *ATig, s.a.* 513. See also *CS, s.a.* 511.

[43] *AFM, s.a.* 448.

[44] Muirchú, i, 17.3 (p. 88); Tírechán, 13.1–3 (p. 132).

[45] Muirchú, i, 17.3 (pp. 88–89).

[46] Tírechán, 13.3 (pp. 132–35).

[47] Erc has been associated with various locations in Munster and Meath. See Byrne and Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick', p. 99; Swift, 'John O'Donovan'; Swift, 'Pagan Monuments'; Hollo, 'Cú Chulainn and Síd Truim'.

[48] Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', p. 361; Ó Corráin, 'Ireland *c.* 800', pp. 591–92. See also Picard, 'Church and Politics'.

[49] *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. by Meyer, no. 21 (p. 2).

reliquiae adorantur in illa ciuitate quae uocatur Slane' (Erc, son of Daig, whose relics are now adored in the city called Slane).[50]

The identity of the patron saint was intrinsic to the identity and status of the community. As patrons of communities saints often represented territorial interests and were symbolic owners and defenders of the land.[51] Possession of the relics of the saint confirmed this relationship. This is reflected in the hagiographical anecdotes that highlight the contention between monasteries established by the same saint for the custody of their common founder's body after his death. In the *Vita Patricii* Muirchú's account of the struggle for Patrick's relics illustrates how much was at stake:

> De reliquiis sancti Patricii in tempore obitus sui dira contensio ad bellum usque peruueniens inter neoptes Neill et Orientales ex una parte <et inter Ulatanos ex altera parte>, inter aliquando propinquales et propinquos, nunc inter dirissimos hostes, irarum intrat certamen

> At the time of holy Patrick's death bitter contention for his relics, leading even to war, between the Uí Neill and the Airthir on the one hand and the Ulaid on the other — tribes at one time neighbourly and friendly, now bitter enemies — came to breaking-point.[52]

The act of interference with the remains of the saint is explained and justified, with the 'disappearance' of the relics deemed necessary to secure concord between the warring tribes.[53] Muirchú explains that, lest the relics 'be removed from the ground', the angel ordered that 'one cubit of earth' be placed on Patrick's body (Et dixit ei: 'Ne reliquiae a terra reducantur corporis tui, et cubitus de terra super corpus fiat').[54] It is another example that elucidates how important corporeal relics were in the early Irish Church.

Later *vitae* also continue this tradition. Disagreements over the rightful ownership of the bones of St Molua of Clonfertmulloe were solved in a similar scenario, echoing the motif used by Muirchú regarding the oxen and the body of Patrick (examined above Chapter 3).[55] According to Molua's *Vita*, an angel appeared and ordered that two untamed oxen should determine the saint's final

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[50] Muirchú, I, 17.3 (p. 88).

[51] Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 208; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 141–46.

[52] Muirchú, II, 13 (pp. 120–21).

[53] Muirchú, II, 14 (p. 120).

[54] Muirchú, II, 12 (pp. 120–21).

[55] Muirchú, II, 11.1 (p. 120).

resting place.[56] The location of the relics of Áed mac Bricc may also have been determined by politics, which sheds light on the interaction between secular and ecclesiastical authorities in the eighth century.[57] The account of the miraculous translation of the saint's body from a church in North Munster to one in Uí Néill territory may be a reflection of a 'contemporary power shift'.[58] The dispute over the relics of Abbán was explained by his thirteenth-century hagiographer as caused by the high value of the relics to the holders.[59] After Abbán's death in his monastery of *Magh-Arnuidhe*, his body was retrieved by locals of his birthplace, *Ceall-Abbain*, to the great loss of the monastery where he died: 'quia se liberandos ab omni malo, et se augendos in omni bono non dubitabant, petita gratia iuxta reliquias tanti viri, sicut liberati sunt ab ipso inter eos viuente' (because they did not doubt that his relics would save them from all evil and bring them all good things, just as he had done when living amongst them).[60] These examples expose a relatively common problem in early Ireland, since many Irish saints were associated with multiple locations and/or credited with numerous foundations. Columba was responsible for the extensive Columban federation of churches in Ireland and Scotland. Charles-Edwards points out that in the eighth century Bede regarded Iona as superior to Durrow, even though Durrow was the earlier foundation.[61] However, what remained important to Bede was the location of Columba's physical remains — Iona.[62] Indeed, Iona is still traditionally viewed as the chief Columban monastery, despite the fact that the heir of Columba and most of the community moved to Kells in the ninth century and that Derry assumed supremacy in the twelfth century.[63]

Muirchú's account of the location of Patrick's relics reveals how the vastly changed political landscape of the late seventh century caused him difficulty in his attempts to reconcile the different traditions of Patrick. Armagh was located in the area of the Airgialla, who were subject to the Ulaid. However, the Ulaid lost substantial territory after the Battle of Mag Roth (Moira, Co. Down) in

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[56] *Vita Sancti Moluae*, ed. by Plummer, 52 (p. 224). See also the burial of St Fainche, Plummer, *VSH*, II, 65.

[57] *Vita S. Aidi Killariensis*, ed. by Heist, 11 (pp. 170–71), 42 (p. 179).

[58] See discussion by Herbert, 'Hagiography and Holy Bodies', p. 253.

[59] *Vita Sancti Abbani*, ed. by Plummer, 49–50 (pp. 30–31).

[60] *Vita Sancti Abbani*, ed. by Plummer, 50 (p. 31).

[61] Charles-Edwards, 'Saints' Cults', p. 174.

[62] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, III, 4 (p. 222).

[63] See Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, especially chaps 5, 6, and 9.

637, resulting in an increase of power for the Airgialla.[64] By Muirchú's day the Ulaid continued to honour Armagh but the church was now in Airgialla territory and thus beyond their control. Nevertheless, the Ulaid claimed to possess the body of Patrick at Saul or Downpatrick and also possessed many important monasteries such as Bangor. This would have heightened hostility between the peoples.[65] However, while Armagh did not possess the body of Patrick it did promote other relics, as outlined in the *Liber Angeli*. These relics became vital to Armagh's position within the Irish Church and society.

Insignia

Allegiance and association were represented physically and tangibly in the form of relics. Once relics were in place within the church they became part of the official emblems or insignia, and as such were used to represent that church's position and status. Insignia, meaning symbols or badges of office, were a specific type of relic venerated for their association with a particular saint or church.[66] As insignia, relics effectively symbolized the saint and his church. If they were disrespected in any manner (for example, by not according the holder of the relics due respect and hospitality) this was equivalent to slighting the actual saint, which would require proper retribution. The insignia of Patrick were viewed as the most important within this hierarchy. The importance attached to the relics of the holy founders explains the efforts of the lawyers and hagiographers of Armagh to justify an abnormal situation. In the late seventh century, Patrick's body was not in Armagh but in the territory of the Ulaid, enemies of the secular patrons of Armagh, the Airgialla and the Uí Néill. However, the *Liber Angeli* stresses that Armagh possessed the insignia of Patrick, that is to say, the sacred objects of his ministry. This text outlines specifically the respect that was due to the Church of Armagh on account of these relics:

> Item quicumque contempserit aut uiolauerit insignia consecrata eiusdem agii, id est Patricii, duplicia soluet; si uero de contemptu aliorum insignium reddita fuerit duas ancellas, <quattuor ancellae> de consecratis summi praedicti doctoris Patricii reddentur.-,- Item quicumque similiter per industriam atque iniuriam uel nequitiam malum quodque opus contra familiam seu paruchiam eius perficerit aut prae-

[64] *AU, s.a.* 637; Doherty, 'Cult of Patrick', p. 71; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 494–98.

[65] Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 82.

[66] See Appendix and the discussion in chap. 5.

dicta eius insignia dispexerit, ad libertatem examinis eiusdem Airdd Machae prae-
sulis recte iudicantis perueniet caussa totius negotionis caeteris aliorum iudicibus
praetermissis.

Further, whosoever insults or violates the consecrated insignia of the same saint,
that is, Patrick, shall pay twofold; if, however, in respect of the contempt of the
insignia of others the due is (to pay) two female slaves, four female slaves shall
be rendered in respect of the consecrated (insignia) of the said supreme doctor
Patrick.-,.- Further, likewise, whosoever intentionally and injuriously or wickedly
commits an evil deed against his community or *paruchia* or insults his aforesaid
insignia, the whole affair shall be left to the free investigation of the said bishop of
Armagh, as of right judging, without reference to other judges.[67]

Clearly then, the *Liber Angeli* is placing the insignia of Patrick at the top of the
hierarchy of relics within the Irish Church. The regulations in relation to the
violation of these insignia are a logical extension to the rules governing hospital-
ity outlined before this section in the *Liber Angeli*, since they enforce the pro-
tection and respect due to the bishop of Armagh during circuits of visitation.
The text claims that he is entitled to quite an elaborate and costly reception:

Praebeatur ei uniali uice reffectionis dignae consulatio praedictorum hospitum
numero centum cum pabulis suis illorum iumentis praeter hospites et infirmos et
eos qui iectant infantes super aeclessiam et caeteros seu reprobos et alios.

He shall be given once a worthy refection for the said number of a hundred guests,
with fodder for their animals, not counting strangers and the sick and those who
abandon infants at the church and the rest, whether outcasts or others.[68]

These excessive and possibly exaggerated claims to hospitality are most likely
designed to demonstrate the superior dignity of Patrick's heir over all other
ecclesiastics.[69]

The *Liber Angeli* represents a political statement of jurisdiction and power.
Crucial in the text is the distinction between the term *insignia* and the term
reliquiae, which is used earlier to refer to the relics of Roman martyrs.[70]
Tírechán indicates how these martyrial relics were used to bind other churches

[67] *LA*, 26 (pp. 188–89).

[68] *LA*, 24 (pp. 188–89).

[69] Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, pp. 112–13.

[70] *LA*, 19 (pp. 186–89).

to Armagh, just as Armagh was bound to Rome.[71] Furthermore, as we have seen above, the authors of the *Liber Angeli* used possession of these Roman relics to support Armagh's claims to pre-eminence within the Irish Church.[72] The conclusion of the lawyers of Armagh is that these extraordinary relics confirm the superior status and authority of the successor of Patrick — to whom all the bishops and abbots in Ireland must give precedence. This strengthened Armagh's Roman connections and 'proved' its superiority over all the churches in Ireland.[73] The insignia of Patrick fulfilled a different function. Allegiance was due to Armagh by the relics of the martyrs, but this was quantified and enforced by the insignia of Patrick. Insignia were a crucial type of relic in defining and shaping the identities of early Irish churches and their relationships with each other. While the relics of Peter and Paul tied Armagh to Rome, and in turn bound other churches to it, it was the insignia of Patrick that represented Armagh as an institution and a community.

The *Bachall Ísu* and Patrick's bell were most likely Armagh's most prized insignia. Other possible insignia of Patrick have received less notice. Patrick's chariot is a conceivable candidate. It features heavily in the *Book of Armagh*. Indeed, his charioteer Boidmal, whose death and burial were carefully noted by Tírechán, was clearly highly respected.[74] Patrick's chariot even warrants a long note among the *Additamenta*:

> Luid Sechnall iar tain du chuúrsagad Pátricc im charpat boie lais. Di sin dufoid Pátricc in carpat cu Sechnall cen arith n-and act aingil dutfidedar. Foidsi Sechnall ó ruan .iii. aithgi lais cu Manchán, 7 anis .iii. aithgi la suide. Foitsi side cu Fiacc. Dlomis Fíacc dóib iar sin. It é immelotar immuan eclis fu thrí, co n-epert int aingel: 'Is duitsiu tucad ó Pátricc ó rufitir du lobri'.[75]

> Sechnall went after a while to reproach Patrick about the chariot which he had. Then Patrick sent the chariot to Sechnall without a charioteer in it save an angel who guided it. When it had remained three nights with Sechnall he sent it to Manchán, and with him it remained three nights. He sent it on to Fíacc. Fíacc warned them off afterwards. They went around the church three times and the

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[71] Tírechán, II, 3.5 (p. 122).

[72] Discussed above, chap. 2.

[73] The continuing importance of the relics of Peter and Paul to Armagh is seen in the dedication of a church to Peter and Paul in Armagh in 1126.

[74] Tírechán, 17.2 (p. 138).

[75] *Additamenta*, ed. by Bieler, 15 (1–2) (p. 178).

angel said (to Fíacc): 'It is to you it has been given by Patrick, since he knows of your infirmity.'

The chariot would seem to have been circulated among churches as a symbol of the authority of Armagh, and this practice may have been influenced by its role in kingship rituals. Stuart Piggott has shown the importance of chariots in relation to kingship in mythology and early history and the symbolic importance with which they were imbued.[76] Indeed, Patrick's chariot features frequently in his hagiography in general. For example, the *Vita Tripartita* describes four chariots brought to Patrick in Armagh, ostensibly on his departure to Rome in search of relics.[77]

A note attributed to Tírechán adds credence to the suggestion that insignia of Patrick would have included his bell. Among the items brought by Patrick across the Shannon were 'quinquaginta clocos' (fifty bells).[78] Also significant is the statement that 'reliquit illos in locis nouis' (he left them in the new places), which confirms their important role in the establishment of a church, perhaps as insignia of these newly founded communities.[79] Either way it seems most likely that the insignia of Patrick were associative rather than corporeal relics. Certainly, references to the veneration and enshrining of associative relics (whether bells, crosiers, or books) outnumber the references to corporeal remains in the later period.

Bourke has detailed the relatively extensive list of bells and crosiers that have been associated with Columba down through the centuries.[80] He shows how the cleric's staff became regarded as an extension of the individual.[81] Indeed, Adomnán's discussion of the staffs of Columba and Cainnech indicate that he viewed the staff as a very personal item and perhaps one that was integral to an ecclesiastic's identity.[82] In the *Vita Columbae*, Cainnech is portrayed as deeply upset when he realizes that he left his staff behind on Iona on his return to Ireland: 'Cainnechus proinde ad Oidecham appropinquans insulam subito de

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[76] See Piggott, *Wagon, Chariot and Carriage*.

[77] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2813–20 (p. 141). Cf. the five chariots mentioned the *Vita Quarta*, ed. by Bieler, 93 (p. 113).

[78] Tírechán, II, 1 (p. 122).

[79] Discussed above, chap. 4.

[80] See Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II'.

[81] Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II', p. 167

[82] *VSC*, I, 33 (p. 62), II, 14 (p. 112).

sua obliuione conpunctus interius perculsus est' (So Cainnech, approaching the island of Oídech, suddenly conscious of his forgetfulness, was struck with inward dismay).[83] Of course, Columba, understanding the importance of the staff, miraculously conveyed it to Cainnech's location without being prompted. Bannerman shows that the insignia and *scrín* 'shrine' of Columba were promoted just as fervently as Patrick's in Armagh, especially in relation to the shifting political landscape of the *familia Columbae* after the mid-ninth century.[84]

While there is little surviving evidence of the last days of Columbanus,[85] the remaining fragments of the, arguably eighth-century, *Vita Vetustissima* of St Gallus assert that Columbanus commanded that his staff should be sent to Gallus as a sign of absolution.[86] The author of Gallus's *Life* surely picked the staff as it was a potent symbol of Columbanus's office and lent authority to the absolution. Like Armagh, these churches preciously guarded the authority and power of their insignia. For example, as mentioned earlier, we are told that respect was due to Máedóc of Ferns on account of his (quite diverse collection of) wonder-working relics or insignia: 'le cois na ffethal ffertach'.[87] Literally meaning 'that which indicates', *fethal* is associated with the administrative and official use of relics.[88] A Middle Irish note on the status of the chief churches of Munster contained in Rawlinson B512 lists the five *prímfethail* of every church as a crosier, *meinistir*, cross, bell, and Gospel.[89] Likewise, *Cáin Adamnáin* is early testament to the use of *fethal* to denote official emblems possessed by a church:

> Iss ead in so forus cána Adomnán for Hérinn 7 Albain: sóire ecalsi Dé cona muintir 7 a fethlaib 7 a termnaib 7 a n-ule folud béudu 7 marbdu 7 al-láichib dligthechaib cona cétmunteraib téchtaidib bíte fo réir Adomnáin 7 anamcharat téchtaide ecnaid cráibthig.

> This is the enactment of the Law of Adomnán in Ireland and in Britain: the immunity of the church of God with her *familia* and her insignia and her sanctuaries and all the property, animate and inanimate, and her law-abiding laymen with their

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83 *VSC*, ɪɪ, 14 (pp. 112–13).

84 See Bannerman, '*Comarba Coluim Cille*'.

85 Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus', p. 27.

86 *Vita Galli Vetustissima*, ed. by Krusch, pp. 251–52.

87 *Life of Maedoc of Ferns II*, ed. by Plummer, ɪ, 198 (p. 246).

88 See Appendix.

89 Flahive, 'The Status of Munster Churches', p. 32.

legitimate spouses who abide by the will of Adomnán and a proper, wise and holy confessor.[90]

Furthermore, the text stresses that the insignia or relics of churches merit particular protection and if they are damaged or violated in any manner, regardless of the location of the insignia at the time, a full fine is incurred: 'Is óghdíri nach eclais fria sárughud a fethtaltae,[91] cip port i ndéntur' (Every church deserves full *díre* for the violation of its insignia, no matter where it is done).[92] Surely, this last phrase is a reference to the fact that these relics were often taken out of the church to accompany the church leader while on circuit or at assemblies. The exalted position of these emblems, as stated before, is due to the connection with the original founding or patron saint and as such represents the essence of each community's identity. An attack on these insignia was to strike at the heart of the church.

Relics and Representation

Relics, as insignia, symbolically represented a church and its community and the keeper of the insignia carried this authority in dealings with other churches. These representative relics thus facilitated the sealing of treaties of friendship or *amicitia* between churches. As shown in the *Liber Angeli*, the relationships between churches were often expressed as agreements between the saints themselves, who lived centuries previously, rather than the actual current ecclesiastical institutions:

> Inter sanctum Patricium Hibernensium Brigitamque columpnas amicitia caritatis inerat tanta, ut unum cor consiliumque haberent unum. Christus per illum illamque uirtutes multas peregit. Vir ergo sanctus Christianae uirgini ait: 'O mea Brigita, paruchia tua in prouincia tua apud reputabitur monarchiam tuam, in parte autem orientali et occidentali dominatu in meo erit'.

> Between holy Patrick and Brigit, pillars (dignitaries) of the Irish, there existed a great friendship of charity that they were of one heart and one mind. Christ worked many miracles through him and her. The holy man, then, said to the Christian

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[90] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer, 34 (p. 24); 'The Law of Adomnán', trans. by Ní Dhonnchadha, p. 62.

[91] Miswritten for *fethaldae*, a derivative of *fethal*, see *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer, p. 44.

[92] *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. by Meyer, 36 (p. 26); 'The Law of Adomnán', trans. by Ní Dhonnchadha, p. 63.

virgin: 'O my Brigit, your *paruchia* will be deemed to be in your province in your dominion, but in the eastern and western part it will be in my domination'.[93]

Agreement between Armagh and Kildare, therefore, was expressed as an *amicitia* between the two saints.[94] The Latin term *amicitia* literally means 'friendship'. However, in the late antique and early medieval periods it more often denoted a political alliance or patronage.[95] Brown's analysis of *amicitia* as earthly and heavenly patronage has shown that relics played a key role in creating and maintaining these treaties and alliances in late antique society.[96] Indeed, the existing structures of *amicitia* and *unanimitas* in this culture facilitated the growth of the cult of relics and the transport of these sacred objects around the Mediterranean. Despite the lack of a direct Roman heritage, the system in Ireland was not all that different. Tírechán demonstrates that compacts or friendships were sometimes solidified in the presence of relics in seventh-century Ireland. He narrates a story about the maiden Mathona, who came to Patrick in pilgrimage and took the veil from Patrick and Rodanus.[97] She 'entered into a solemn compact with the successors of holy Rodanus, swearing by his relics, and his successors dined together (with her)' (ipsa fecit amicitiam ad reliquias sancti Rodani et successores illius epulabantur ad inuicem).[98] Furthermore, Tírechán criticizes other churches that spurned the overtures of *amicitia* from disciples of Patrick, Bronus, and Bitheus: 'non quaerebant aliquid a familia Dumiche nissi amicitiam tantummodo, sed quaerit familia Clono, qui per uim tenent locos Patricii multos post mortalitates nouissimas' (they demanded nothing of the community of Dumech except their friendship only, but the community of Clonmacnoise claims them, as they hold forcibly many of Patrick's places since the recent plague).[99]

The political context here is telling. Mathona, sister of Benignus the successor of Patrick, received the veil from Patrick and Rodanus, and Patrick established a free church at Tamnach: 'monacha fuit illis et exiit per montem filiorum Ailello et plantauit aeclessiam liberam hi Tamnuch' (she was a nun to

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[93] *LA*, xi, 3 (32) (pp. 190–91).

[94] *LA*, xi, 3 (32) (pp. 190–91).

[95] See Brunt, '"Amicitia" in the Late Roman Republic'.

[96] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, p. 90.

[97] Tírechán, 24.1 (p. 140).

[98] Tírechán, 24.1–2 (pp. 140–43).

[99] Tírechán, 25.1 (pp. 142–43).

them, and he went out across the mountain of the sons of Ailill and established a free church at Tamnach).[100] Although it appears that Tamnach subsequently became an episcopal, and therefore superior, church, Mathona made an alliance with the heir of Rodanus at Dumech. The dependence suggested by Mathona's reception of the veil from the priest Rodanus, when balanced against the superior status of the episcopal church Tamnach, was appropriately expressed by mutual hospitality. The implication of Tírechán's statement that nothing was expected from Dumech except friendship implies that Clonmacnoise claimed something beyond an alliance, presumably some kind of render.[101] The reference to swearing by relics is a mechanism by which Tírechán emphasizes the legitimacy of the relationship between Tamnach and Dumech — an authentication not possessed by Clonmacnoise. Dumech was the church of Rodanus, adjacent to Elphin, in the territory of the Uí Ailella, one of 'the three Connachta', the three principal ruling dynasties of Connacht. By claiming Dumech the ambitions of Clonmacnoise were extending into a territory beyond its area of jurisdiction.[102] Mathona's church, Tamnach, was in the same territory. As we have seen, Mathona was both a nun of Patrick and of Rodanus. Tamnach is said to be a free church, founded for Mathona, the sister of Patrick's successor at Armagh, Benignus. Furthermore, Charles-Edwards has suggested that Tírechán was troubled by the possible intrusion of Clonmacnoise into a harmonious relationship between two churches within the same kingdom.[103]

Tírechán relates how other churches under Armagh's jurisdiction had also been usurped. This may be what is implied in the comment next to the name *Temoreris* in Tírechán's list of the bishops ordained by Patrick. He states that this bishop 'fundauit aeclessiam sanctam Cairce, quam tenuit familia Clónó Auiss' (founded the church of Carrac, which was held by the community of Clones).[104] Noting the past tense, Kim McCone suggested that Armagh had recovered this church a short time before Tírechán wrote the *Collectanea*, perhaps in the aftermath of the great plague (664–68), which left many of the older and smaller communities weak and susceptible to takeover.[105] Carrac may perhaps be equated with Carrickmore (Co. Donegal) or Carrigans (Gaeth an

[100] Tírechán, 24.2 (pp. 140–41).

[101] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 254.

[102] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 252.

[103] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 254.

[104] Tírechán, 7.2 (p. 130).

[105] McCone, 'Clones', p. 308.

Chairrgín) on the west bank of the Foyle.[106] Furthermore, Tírechán uses relics, when possible, to authenticate his claims. He is particularly concerned with the bones of Bishop Assicus, Patrick's coppersmith (*faber aereus*), in Mag Sereth in Ráth Cungi, south Donegal.[107] The location of the relics is of particular significance as the monastic communities of Columba (probably Derry) and Ardstraw had claimed him as their own. Tírechán stresses that he was in fact a monk of Patrick: 'Monachus Patricii, sed contenderunt eum familia Columbae Cille et familia Airdd Sratha' (He (was) a monk of Patrick's, but the community of Colum Cille and the community of Ardd Sratha claimed him).[108] This situation clearly vexed Tírechán. He claimed that the heir of Patrick, apostle of the Irish, had authority over all the primitive churches of Ireland:

> Cor autem meum cogitat in me de Patricii dilectione, quia uideo dissertores et archiclocos et milites Hiberniae quod odio habent paruchiam Patricii, quia substraxerunt ab eo quod ipsius erat timentque quoniam, si quaereret heres Patricii paruchiam illius, potest pene totam insolam sibi reddere in paruchiam [...] quia ipsius sunt omnes primitiuae aeclessiae Hiberniae.[109]

> However, my heart within me is filled with the (sorrowing) love for Patrick, because I see deserters and (monastic) arch-robbers and soldiers of Ireland hate Patrick's *paruchia*, because they have taken away for him what was his and are afraid; for if an heir of Patrick were to investigate his *paruchia* he could vindicate for him almost the whole island with its people [...] because all the primitive churches of Ireland are his.[110]

Tírechán echoes the jurisdictional rights enshrined in the *Liber Angeli* while declaring that overswearing against Patrick (i.e. Armagh) was forbidden: 'non licet iurare contra eum ii. et super eum iii. et de eo' (it is not permitted to swear against him, ii. or overswear him, iii. or swear concerning him).[111] As we have seen, these entitlements were enforced through the insignia. Muirchú also upholds these rights in his *Vita Patricii*. In this text the angel Victor grants

[106] Silke, 'Airgialla Churches', p. 85. See also, Doherty, 'Cult of Patrick', pp. 62–64, who discusses the churches lamented as lost by Tírechán.

[107] Tírechán, 22 (p. 140).

[108] Tírechán, 22.4 (pp. 140–41).

[109] Tírechán, 18.2 (p. 138).

[110] Thanks are due to Charles Doherty for providing the translation of this difficult passage. Some of the terminology, such as *archiclocos* and *milites Hiberniae*, is problematic and Bieler's translation is now somewhat dated.

[111] Tírechán, 18.4 (pp. 138–39).

Patrick four requests, the first of which confirmed Patrick's supremacy in Armagh: 'Prima petitio, ut in Ardd Machae fiat ordinatio tua' (The first request, that your pre-eminence shall be in Armagh).[112] An early record of these jurisdictional rights may be found in the abecedarian hymn *Audites omnes amantes*, perhaps composed as early as the late sixth century.[113] Arguably the earliest manifestation of the cult of Patrick, *Audites omnes* emphasizes the saint's apostolic nature, by comparing Patrick to St Peter: 'super quem aedificatur ut Petrus aeclessia cuiusque apostolatum a Deo sortitus est' (on whom, like Peter, the Church is built, and whose apostolate he has from God).[114]

A closer look at Tírechán's description of the relationship between Mathona and Rodanus yields further insights. The language used indicates that the successors of Mathona and Rodanus entered into a special relationship known as *cairde* in Irish, which would have been established originally by an oath and later by relics.[115] *Cairde*, literally meaning friendship, is a term used in the law texts to refer to peaceful relations or a covenant, pact, or treaty either within a particular territory or between two or more territories. In this way *cairde* denoted a local peace, as opposed to *cáin*, which usually referred to the general law.[116] According to *Críth Gablach*, *cairde* refers to a solemn compact made between kings of *túatha*, often at *óenaig*.[117] As Binchy explains, these *cairde* treaties ranged from simple agreements to 'far-reaching arrangements for mutual recognition and enforcement of legal claims'.[118] The term is often supplied as an Old Irish gloss to the Latin *pactum*, which indicates a more binding agreement than simply just a friendship.[119] Indeed, one gloss on a commentary on the Psalms explained a phrase 'hoc itaque deuidicare' (to give final judgement) as meaning 'incomscar dia són acairde during frinnai fanaic' (whether God annulled the *cairde* that He had made with us or not).[120]

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[112] Muirchú, ii, 6.1 (p. 116).

[113] For a summary of debates and evidence for a sixth-century date, see Orchard, 'Audite Omnes Amantes'; Howlett, *The Celtic Latin Tradition*, pp. 138–52.

[114] 'The Hymn of St. Secundinus', ed. by Bieler, ll. 10–11 (p. 119); trans. by Orchard, 'Audite Omnes Amantes', p. 167.

[115] Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 223.

[116] See above, chap. 5.

[117] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, ll. 502–08 (p. 20).

[118] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, p. 80.

[119] See, for example, *Thes. Pal.*, i, 5, l. 18, p. 317, l. 17.

[120] *Thes. Pal.*, i, 309. See also the term *óentu*, which can refer to agreements between saints, *DIL*, 2012 O 107.

In both the secular and ecclesiastical texts we can, therefore, garner an insight into the delicate threads of alliances that were facilitated by relics. They were often present in the initiation of the 'friendly' *cairde* agreements and were exchanged as emblems of newly formed or reaffirmed alliances. This use of relics fitted into the system of reciprocity and gift exchange that was an important feature of late antique and medieval society. More than just a sign of friendship, gift exchange was a central act in formalizing political, social, and economic relationships and contracts.[121] The most common means of acquiring non-local relics in the Middle Ages was to receive them as gifts.[122] Gifts of relics were common between ecclesiastical and political elites and were sometimes accompanied by a *vita* as a form of authentication.[123] As we have seen, the pope was a key donor, and scholars have emphasized how the papacy exploited its store of relics to solidify relationships with the powerful Frankish Church in the ninth century.[124] These relics theoretically 'remained the pope's, and their recipients remained subordinate to the pope by the ties created in their distribution'.[125] This type of network was emulated on a smaller scale by bishops and other important clerics in Western Christendom, creating bonds of patronage and reciprocity.

The testimony of the *Vita Tripartita*, repeated in the *Life of Mac Caírthinn*, recounts that Clogher's prized possession, the silver reliquary named *Domnach Argit*, was actually received as a gift from Patrick: 'Ocus forácaib Pátraic íarom épscop Macc Cairthind hi Clochur, 7 in domnach airgit leis' (And Patrick then left Bishop Macc Caírthinn in Clochar, and the *domnach airgit* with him).[126] This shrine contained 'relics of the holy Apostles and some of the hair of holy Mary and a portion of the holy Cross of the Lord and of his tomb and other holy relics' (in quo de sanctorum apostolorum reliquiis et de sancte Marie capillis et sancta cruce Domini et sepulcro eius et aliis sanctis reliquiis).[127] Mac Caírthinn, accordingly, founded a church with the relics: 'Quibus dictis, dimisit eum cum osculo pacis, paterna fultus benedictione. Itaque, illuc per-

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[121] Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade', pp. 67–70.

[122] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 208–10.

[123] Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*, p. 84.

[124] See Fichtenau, 'Zum Reliquienwesen'; Geary, *Living with the Dead*, chap. 9.

[125] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 210.

[126] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2049–50 (p. 108).

[127] *Vita S. Maccarthinni Episcopi Clocharensis*, ed. by Heist, 1 (p. 344); 'Macartan', trans. by Doherty, p. 66.

veniens, Clochorense fundavit monasterium' (With these words he sent him away with a kiss of peace, supported by a fatherly blessing. And so, arriving there, he founded a monastery at Clogher).[128] Furthermore, the *Vita Tripartita*, through the words of Patrick, enshrines a custom of reciprocal visiting rights between the two churches: '"Fotuigeb-sa dano," ol Pátraic, "hi cill napa ro-ocus arnapa dimicnithi: nípa ró-chian dano co róastar immathigid etronn"' ('I will leave you, then, in a church', said Patrick, 'that shall not be very far, so that mutual visiting between us be continued').[129] Doherty argues that this agreement reflects the relationship established by Artrí mac Conchobair, bishop and coarb of Armagh, in the early ninth century.[130]

The *Vita Tripartita* also offers some insight into the sort of alliances made in early Ireland in an episode that expands upon the first encounter between Erc and Patrick detailed by Tírechán and Muirchú.[131] Erc was in the retinue of the pagan king, most likely in the capacity of judge or legal advisor. In the confrontation between the king and the saint over the lighting of the paschal fire at Slane, Erc was the only man who ignored the command of the druids and stood up before Patrick. Subsequently, Erc was baptized by Patrick and entered his household. However, the *Vita Tripartita* elaborates on this encounter by formalizing an alliance between the two saints:

> Dorat Pátraic bennacht fair, 7 ro creid do Día, 7 foruismi in hiris catholacdai 7 ro baitsed; 7 adrubairt Pátraic fris: 'Bid árd, bid úasal do chathir i talum,' 7 dlegair do c[h]omarbu Pátraic a glún do tecbail réna c[h]omharbu co bráth tar hési a humaildóite.[132]

> Patrick bestowed a blessing on him, and he believed in God and acknowledged the Catholic faith, and he was baptized; and Patrick said to him: 'It will be high, it will be noble, your city on earth', and Patrick's heir is obliged to raise his knee before [Erc's] heir forever after receiving his humility.

This formed a bond between Armagh and Slane. As Charles-Edwards has identified, *Críth Gablach* enshrines the 'raising of the knee' as a symbolic gesture of respect and in some cases subordination.[133] At the very end of the text,

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[128] *Vita S. Maccarthinni Episcopi Clocharensis*, ed. by Heist, 1 (p. 344); 'Macartan', trans. by Doherty, p. 66.

[129] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2047–49 (pp. 107–08).

[130] Doherty, 'Macartan', pp. 60–61. See also Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention', pp. 48–55.

[131] Muirchú, I, 17.3 (p. 88); Tírechán, 13.1–3 (p. 132).

[132] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 470–75 (p. 29).

[133] Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 254.

it defines the relative status of the bishop and the king of a *tuath*: 'Cía de as sruithiu, in rí(g) fa epscop? Is [s]riuthiu epscop, húare arnéraig rí(g) fo bíth creitme; tuarga[i]b epscop dano glún ria ríg' (Which is higher in dignity, a king or a bishop? A bishop is higher, since a king rises to salute him because of religion. A bishop, too, raises his knee to salute a king).[134] They are of equal status but the king should rise up before the bishop as a sign of his respect for the faith, whereas the bishop only raises his knee when the king enters to signify their equality. The alliance between Erc and Patrick thus seems to demonstrate a relationship of mutual respect and equality between Armagh and Slane in which no tribute is demanded. However, the relationship between churches was not always so simple. Often dues and tributes were demanded and these were usually enforced by use of insignia or relics. As discussed above (Chapter 4) a sort of symbolic peppercorn rent was paid annually from Nendrum to Armagh (or Down) on account of Patrick's gift of relics to the founder Mocháe.

Power and Control

The desecration of relics and, by extension, of persons intimately connected with them, sometimes in the form of breaking contracts made in the presence of relics, was severely discouraged. The references to these instances of profanation provide an interesting insight into alliances and maintenance of power within the Irish Church and society. The annals are a valuable source in this regard.

A key incident of disrespect towards Armagh was the assault by the notorious Donnchad Midi in 789 on the *Bachall Ísu* and relics of Patrick at an assembly at Ráth Airthir:[135] 'Sarugad Bachlu Isu 7 minn Patraic la Donnchad m. nDomnaill oc Raith Airthir ar oenach' (Dishonouring of the staff of

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[134] *Críth Gablach*, ed. by Binchy, ll. 604–06 (p. 24); trans. by MacNeill, 'Law of Status or Franchise', p. 306.

[135] For the identification of Ráth Airthir within the neighbourhood of Tailtiu, see Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, p. 566. Byrne (*Irish Kings*, p. 87), following John O'Donovan (*O.S. Letters, Meath*, p. 20 58), claimed that Ráth Airthir could be identified with Oristown, Co. Meath. However, a suggestion made by William Wilde (*The Beauties of the Boyne*, p. 130) that the site is in fact next to the modern church of Donaghpatrick now receives most support. This makes the site even closer to Tailtiu than O'Donovan and Byrne envisaged. See Swift, 'The Local Context of Óenach Tailten', pp. 24–26, for a summary of the arguments and for the close connection of the three aforementioned sites (Ráith Airthir, Donaghpatrick, and Tailtiu) in the *Vita Tripartita*.

Jesus and relics of Patrick by Donnchad son of Domnall at Ráth Airthir at an assembly).[136] The context here is revealing. In 778 Donnchad emphasized his support of Iona by enforcing the 'Law of Columba' with Bresal, abbot of Iona.[137] The dishonouring of the *Bachall Ísu* and relics of Patrick, the insignia of Armagh, was a clear statement of allegiance to this effect. He had previously attacked assemblies on at least two occasions. The *Annals of Ulster* record a melee caused by Donnchad at a 'public contest' in 774 which is a possible reference to Tailtiu: 'Comixtio agonis la Donnchad'.[138] Again, in 777, he disrupted an *óenach* by attacking the Ciannachta present, as part of his campaign against Brega: 'Cumuscc ind oenaigh la Donnchad for Ciannacht. In coccadh iter Donnchad 7 Congalach' (Disturbance of the *óenach* by Donnchad against the Ciannacht. Warfare between Donnchad and Congalach).[139] Over a thirty-three year period the annals record Donnchad's rise to high king, his military might, and ruthless actions. His dominating presence pervades the folia of the annals. His unremitting military aggression allowed his dynasty, the Clann Cholmáin, to establish control of the midlands. The annalistic record of 789 provides a valuable insight into the interaction of secular and ecclesiastical leaders and also into abbatial contention at Armagh in the late eighth century — as demonstrated by Craig Haggart.[140] Following the evidence from the *Comarbada Pátraic*, Haggart argues that the annal entry may be an indication that the powerful Donnchad Midi seized the relics that represented Dub dá Leithe's authority in order to undermine his abbacy (which was contested by Cú Dinisc and Faendelach).[141] This would indicate that the abbot of a metropolitan church could be appointed or removed by the dominant political power.

There was further controversy surrounding the *óenach* of Tailtiu in 811: 'Derbaid aige Dia Sathairnn oinigh Tailten conna-recht ech na carpat la Aedh m. Neill' (Prevention of the celebration of the *óenach* of Tailtiu on a Saturday, so that neither horse nor chariot arrived there, under the aegis of Áed son of Niall).[142]

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[136] *AU, s.a.* 789.

[137] *AU, s.a.* 778: 'Lex Coluim Cille la Donnchad 7 Bresal'.

[138] *Annals of Ulster*, ed. by Hennessy, p. 242 and Stokes, 'On the Linguistic Value of the Irish Annals', p. 375, following Charles O'Conor, equated this *agon* with the traditional assembly at Tailtiu.

[139] *AU, s.a.* 777.

[140] Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention'. See also Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn'.

[141] Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention', p. 47.

[142] *AU, s.a.* 811.

The annalist elaborates that the community of Tallaght instigated a boy-cott after their sanctuary was violated by the Uí Néill, who were subse-quently forced to appease Tallaght with the bestowal of gifts: 'id est muinnter Tamlachta dod-rorbai iar sarugad termainn Tamlachtai Maele Ruain du U Neill, 7 postea familiae Tamlachtae multa munera reddita sunt' (i.e. the people of Tallaght who prevented it, because of the violation of the protected lands of Tallaght Maelruain by the Uí Néill, and many gifts were afterwards pre-sented to the family of Tallaght).[143] This episode reflects the delicate threads of power that were woven through relics in early Irish society. Two years ear-lier the Uí Néill had been attacked in a similar manner. In 809, the *Annals of Ulster* record: 'Occisio Dunchon principis Telcha Leiss hi fail scrine Patraicc i tigh abad Telcha Liss' (the murder of Dúnchú, superior of the community of Tullylish beside the shrine of Patrick in the abbot's house).[144] We are informed later in the same year that the repercussion of this act was an attack by Áed son of Niall: 'Indredh nUlad la hAedh m. Neill di sarugud scrine Patraic for Dunchoin' (The invasion of Ulaid by Áed son of Niall, as a result of the profa-nation of Patrick's shrine at the expense of Dúnchú).[145] The severe reaction of the community was in response not just to the killing of Dúnchú but also to the perpetration of this act next to the shrine of Patrick. Relics were meant to provide protection and sanctuary. It was a gross violation to commit such a heinous crime in a sacred space. Also, it showed contempt for Patrick and his Church of Armagh, not just of Dúnchú. It was a matter of honour for Áed to retaliate against such a base crime of disrespect, as it was a clear affront to his authority and attempt to belittle his power. This episode is part of the complex political wrangling that characterized Áed's kingship.[146] Áed rose to power after he defeated Donnchad Midi's brothers after his death. Like Donnchad, Áed was very astute at harnessing the power of relics and appreciating their various uses. He fell out with the Columban community due to the murder of Máel Dúin son of Cenn Fáelad, *princeps* of Raphoe: 'Mael Duin m. Cinn Faelad, prinnceps Ratho Both, de familia Columbae Cille, iugulatus est' (Mael Dúin, son of Cenn Faelad, superior of Raphoe, a member of Colum Cille's commu-nity, was slain).[147] This prompted the excommunication of Áed by the com-

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[143] For some context of these events, see Clancy, 'Diarmait *Sapientissimus*', pp. 220–24.

[144] *AU, s.a.* 809.

[145] *AU, s.a.* 809.

[146] See Byrne, 'Church and Politics, *c.* 750–*c.* 1100', pp. 657–64.

[147] *AU, s.a.* 817.

munity of Columba at Tara, which is recorded immediately after the murder of Máel Dúin in the *Annals of Ulster*: 'Muinnter Coluim Cille do dul i Temhair do escuine Aeda' (Colum Cille's people went to Tara to excommunicate Áed).[148]

The word used for these abuses of relics is *sárugud*, 'act of violating, outraging, flouting',[149] the verbal noun of *sáraigid*, which primarily means 'violates, outrages, transgresses'.[150] The term is used to refer to the destruction of a sanctuary in the *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 746, 'Sarughadh Domnaigh Phatraicc; .ui. cimmidi cruciati' (Violation of sanctuary at Domnach Pátraic, six captives hanged), and also the rape of a woman.[151] The destruction of the inner sanctuary of a church and its most prized possession of relics was extremely damaging, as it was a crime that left the victim powerless and exposed. We can garner the sense that the term *sárugud* was reserved for the most intimate of intrusions. The language, thus, indicates that these were acts of asserting power and control in which the aggressor completely overwhelms and overpowers his victim, rendering them helpless and vulnerable. *Sárugud* was the ultimate act of destruction and dominance. We can, therefore, discern that the use of the term to refer to attacks on relics or sanctuaries within churches represents the unforgiveable nature of these acts. This, of course, may have been the outcome sought by the aggressor in each case. He wanted to assert his authority and show that he would not bow down to a particular church or its allies.

Some annalistic entries from the end of the ninth century confirm the violent, and symbolic, nature of these attacks. The *Annals of Ulster s.a.* 891 record the murder of Conchobor son of Flannacán in the church of Cluain Fota. He, along with the relics of Finnia, were destroyed by fire: 'Concobur m. Flannacan, rex Oa Failgi, do orcain fri daigidh i Cluain Fota; m. [muintir?] Fini do sarughadh isind eclais 7 minna Finnia do sarugud oco 7 do loscadh' (Conchobor son of Flannacán, king of Uí Fhailgi was killed by fire in Cluain Fota; the community of Finnio were profaned in the church and the relics of Finnia were profaned by him and burned).[152] The utter devastation caused by

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[148] *AU, s.a.* 817. See Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, I, 276 who suggests that the two events were clearly related.

[149] *DIL*, 2012 S 61.

[150] *DIL*, 2012 S 59.

[151] A commentary on the law text *Cetharslict Athgabála* uses the term to refer to the violation of a virgin, *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, I, 132. In *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, ed. by Gwynn, IV, 24, *sárugad* describes the attempted rape of Sampait by Crechmael.

[152] *AU, s.a.* 891. For an alternative reading of this annal, see Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, I, 337 n. 3.

the fire, not only the death of the king but also the destruction of the church and the relics it enshrined, was expressed in terms of the profanation of the whole community. The *Annals of the Four Masters* note an attack of an army from Connacht on a synod being held on Inis Aingin: 'Sárucchadh Insi Ainghin, 7 duine do ghuin for a lár, & scrín Ciaráin innte, 7 seanadh sruithe im Cairpre Crom, epscop Cluana Mic Nois' (Inis Aingin was profaned, and a man was mortally wounded in the middle of it, and the shrine of Ciaran there, and a synod of seniors, with Cairbre Crom, bishop of Clonmacnoise).[153] The shrine in question most likely consisted of the insignia of office of the bishop of Clonmacnoise, representing his position and authority while at the synod.

When under threat, abbots or leaders of ecclesiastical communities often relied on relics, especially the insignia of their patron saint, for protection and proof of legitimacy. In 818 Cuanu, abbot of Louth, fled to Munster with the shrine of Mochta: 'Cuanu, abbas Lugmaidh, co scrin Mochtai do dul a tire Muman for longais' (Cuanu, abbot of Lugmad, went into exile into the lands of Mumu with the shrine of Mochta).[154] The *Annals of Inisfallen* elaborate that 'the shrine of Mochta of Louth was in flight before Áed, son of Niall, and it came to Lismore' (Scrín [...] Mochta Lugmaid for teched re n-Aed mc. Neill co m-bui i l-Lis Mor).[155] Mochta was a disciple of Patrick credited with the founding of Louth.[156] Cuanu may have taken his patron's shrine with him as he fled since this would have been the insignia of his ministry. This record in particular reflects the practice by which an abbot of a monastery was often accompanied by the major relics belonging to his foundation *even* in cases such as this where the abbot was clearly under pressure. It would perhaps be more apt to remark that in these instances *especially* church leaders held on to these relics, as they were the insignia of their authority and rank. For abbots whose position was under threat the possession of these insignia was crucial because this possession validated their claims. The holder of the insignia of any saint was by extension his or her rightful heir.[157]

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[153] *AFM, s.a.* 894.

[154] *AU, s.a.* 818.

[155] *AI, s.a.* 818.

[156] Died 535, *AU*. Commemorated on 19 August in the *Félire* and the *Martyrology of Tallaght*.

[157] See Bannerman, '*Comarba Coluim Chille*', esp. pp. 20, 28, who argues that this shrine would have contained the corporeal relics of the saint.

The desecration of relics sometimes had grave consequences. In 831, 'Oenach Tailten do cumusc oc Foradhaib im scrin m. Cuilind 7 im minda Patraicc condid aptha ili de' (the *óenach* at Tailtiu was disturbed at the platforms owing to dissension around the shrine of Mac Cuilinn and the relics of Patrick, and many died as a result).[158] This clear attack on the authority of the insignia of Armagh may possibly also be reflected in the capture of Eógan, abbot of Armagh, and his retinue, later that same year: 'Sarugad Eugain Mainisdreach abbatis Airdd Machae hi foigaillnaig la Conchobar m. nDonnchada co n-arrgabtha a muinnter 7 co ructha a graigi' (Eógan of Mainister abbot of Armagh was insulted by confinement/sub-vassalage by Conchobor son of Donnchad, and his followers were taken prisoner, and his horses taken away).[159] Eógan Mainistrech was inserted into the abbacy of Armagh by his patron Niall Caille, king of Cenél nEogain, against fierce opposition, due to his special relationship as *anmchara* 'soul-friend' to the king. Artrí, son of Conchobor, was apparently heir of Patrick at the time and in 827 Eógan's authority as abbot of Armagh was challenged: 'Sarugad Eugain i nArdd Machae la Cumuscach m. Catail 7 la Artrigh m. Concobuir' (The dishonouring of Eógan in Armagh by Cumascach son of Cathal, king of Airgialla, and by Artrí son of Conchobar). According to a verse later appended to *Chronicum Scotorum* a battle was fought between Eógan's champion Niall and Artrí's kinsman Cumuscach. Needless to say, Niall Caille was the victor and Eógan ruled as heir of Patrick until his death. This was the famous battle of Leth Cam, which resulted in the Airgialla falling under the control of the Uí Néill, ensuring Cenél nÉogain supremacy.[160] Eógan presumably acceded to the abbacy of Armagh in 826 after the death of Flanngus mac Loingsig. As emphasized by Haggart, it is surprising that Conchobar mac Donnchada and Clann Cholmáin allowed Eógan to take control also of Clonard which was clearly within Conchobar's sphere of influence.[161] The record of Conchobar's actions against Eógan in 831 indicates his clear opposition to him.

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[158] *AU*, *s.a.* 831. *Forad* is an Old Irish term that denotes a mound or platform. FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland*, p. 50, shows that the citation of *forad* to describe an assembly platform is almost exclusively reserved for monuments within prehistoric ritual complexes like Teamhair and Tailtiu.

[159] *AU*, *s.a.* 831. The meaning of *hi foigaillnaig* is unclear. *DIL*, 2012 F 231, defines it as 'sub-vassalage' as it may be connected to the term *giallna* 'submission, hostageship, security', *DIL*, 2012 G 79. Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *AU*, p. 289, favour the translation 'legal decision'.

[160] Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 124–25.

[161] Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention', pp. 55–56.

The annalistic record of 831 is one of many that draw attention to the role of relics in ecclesiastical politics in the ninth century, especially in relation to Armagh. Not only was possession of the insignia important to command respect from other communities, the holder of the insignia also demanded deference from rivals to his position of authority within the community itself. The context behind an interesting note in the *Annals of Ulster* sheds light on this phenomenon. The entry *s.a* 836 states that the relics of Patrick were taken on tour by Diarmait ua Tigernáin: 'Dermait do dul co Connachta cum lege 7 uexillis Patricii' (Diarmait went to Connachta with Patrick's law and his insignia). *The Ancient List of Coarbs of Patrick* adds a very interesting note to the record of Diarmait, abbot of Armagh in the ninth century: 'Is leis daratad in t-anart etir na gae ac Croiss Ardachaid 7 in t-imaire lossa 7 nir rathcha coro lobsat ar met a smachta' (It is by him the winding-sheet was placed between the spears at the Cross of Ardagh and the ridge of leeks, [...] so that they decayed owing to the greatness of its power).[162] As suggested by Lawlor and Best, the linen sheet is surely that containing Christ's blood which was claimed by the *Liber Angeli* to be one of Armagh's most precious relics.[163] Through possession of this relic and others, the *Liber Angeli* demanded the respect of all subordinate churches to Armagh. Evidently, what is being insinuated here is that Diarmait blighted the crops of those who refused this relic and insignia of Armagh due respect and reverence, perhaps in the form of declining to pay a tribute or accord the holder of the relics due hospitality.

According to Latin dictionaries a *vexillum* is 'a military ensign, standard, banner, or flag'. Lawrence Keppie has shown that in ancient Rome these standards were important rallying points in battle and on the march.[164] In ancient Rome, to lose or surrender a standard was a disgrace. In Christian contexts this standard became a piece of cloth embroidered with Christian symbols such as the chi-rho, instead of the Roman eagle. Since *vexilla* are the military standards of kings and princes, so the *vexilla* of Christ could be the cross, the scourge, the lance, and other implements of the Passion. The military imagery is significant. It is echoed in the gloss on the list of coarbs of Patrick in which Diarmait places the cloth between spears. This is a relatively early attestation of this term in

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[162] Lawlor and Best, 'The Ancient List of Coarbs', p. 325. They date the compilation of the original list to the incumbency of Amalgaid, between 1020 and 1049 (pp. 354–55). Though, of course, the information contained in the list was based upon earlier records. For some context of this episode, see Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention', pp. 56–57.

[163] Lawlor and Best, 'The Ancient List of Coarbs', p. 361.

[164] Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, p. 67.

an Irish context. However, some later evidence from the British Isles may shed some light on the nature of the *vexillum*. C. F. Battiscombe provides convincing evidence that the Banner of St Cuthbert kept in Durham Cathedral was made from, or incorporated, part of the linen winding sheet recovered from the saint's tomb.[165] The *vexillum* of Patrick, therefore, could have been a standard made from or incorporating the linen sheet with Christ's blood on it, thus explaining the note in the *Ancient List of Coarbs of Patrick*. Indeed, David Caldwell, following Forbes Leslie, suggests that the *Breccbennach* of Columba might be the garment in which the saint was wrapped at the time of his death.[166] Caldwell argues that the *Breccbennach* of Columba need not necessarily be equated with the Monymusk Reliquary, now on prominent display as a national relic in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Part of his argument rests on references to the *Breccbennach* as *vexillum* in later sources.[167]

The form used in the *Annals of Ulster* indicates a plural of *vexillum*, perhaps referring to a number of flags or banners accompanying Diarmait on his tour. However, the term is usually reserved for the sole leading standard that headed the touring party or unit and represented their position. It might, therefore, be more plausible if the *vexilla* referred to in the *Annals of Ulster* were taken to represent a number of the relics or insignia of Diarmait's authority as heir of Patrick. Nevertheless, the use of the term may be influenced by the famous hymn *Vexilla regis* by Venantius Fortunatus, the bishop of Poitiers. It has been convincingly argued that the works of Fortunatus had reached Ireland by 590,[168] which is understandable considering the close links between Ireland and Aquitaine in this period.[169] This processional hymn, one of the first of its genre, was composed by Fortunatus to be sung during the arrival and reception of the relic of the True Cross into Poitiers.[170] Gregory of Tours describes the *adventus* of the relic into St Radegund's monastery 'with much chanting of psalms, with pomp of gleaming tapers and incense'.[171] The use of the *Vexilla regis* in

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[165] Battiscombe, 'Historical Introduction', pp. 70–71.

[166] Caldwell, 'The Monymusk Reliquary'.

[167] Caldwell, 'The Monymusk Reliquary', p. 274.

[168] See Alfred Cordoliani, 'Fortunat, l'Irlande et les Irlandais'; Stevenson, 'Irish Hymns, Venantius Fortunatus and Poitiers', p. 101.

[169] See James, 'Ireland and Western Gaul'; Picard, *Aquitaine and Ireland*.

[170] Stevenson, 'Irish Hymns, Venantius Fortunatus and Poitiers', p. 98.

[171] Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. by Krusch and Levison, IX, 40 (p. 464). Discussed above, chap. 3.

the actual procession is recorded by Radegund's hagiographer Baudonivia.[172] The opening stanza, from which the title is taken, highlights the splendour and triumph of this occasion with all the pageantry and spectacle of a great ecclesiastical function:

> Vexilla regis prodeunt,
> fulget crucis mysterium,
> quo carne carnis conditor,
> suspensus est patibulo.[173]
>
> Abroad the regal banners fly,
> now shines the Cross's mystery:
> upon it Life did death endure,
> and yet by death did life procure.[174]

The hymn firmly associates the procession of relics with the flying of the flag or standard of the church.[175]

We can have little doubt that Diarmait and the Church of Armagh fully appreciated the powerful imagery. An examination of the political context provides the motivation for such an outward display of authority and power. The circuit of Patrick's relics by Diarmait in 836 occurred at a time of conflict within Armagh, with rival claimants to the abbacy, Diarmait and Forannán, fighting a protracted battle for control. Each claimant used relics to his advantage with Diarmait succeeding to the rank of abbot in 834. However, his position came under threat from Forannán soon after, and the two clerics contested the abbacy for the subsequent seventeen years.[176] Diarmait toured Connacht with the *vexilla* of Patrick in 836 after Forannán was captured by Feidlimid mac Crimthainn while on visitation in Kildare: 'Gabail in dairthige i Cill Dara for Forindan, abb nAerdd Machae, co samadh Patraic olchena, la Feidlimidh co cath 7 indnu, 7 ro gabta i cact co n-anhumaloit friu' (The oratory of Kildare was seized from Forannán, abbot of Armagh, and Patrick's congregation besides, by Feidlimid by battle and arms, and they were captured with great disobedience

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[172] Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, ed. by Krusch, ɪɪ, 16 (p. 389).

[173] Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns*, p. 174.

[174] A more literal translation would be as follows: 'The banners of the king issue forth, does flash the wonder of the cross, where the preserver in flesh, of flesh, by the crossbar is hung.'

[175] For an examination of its popularity at the turn of the twentieth century, see Burkitt, 'Christian Hymns', p. 22.

[176] Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 222–23.

towards them).[177] Forannán had the relics of Patrick in his possession when he was seized by Vikings in 845: 'Forindan, abbas Aird Machae, du ergabail du genntibh i Cloen Comardai cona mindaibh 7 cona muinntir, 7 a brith do longaibh Luimnigh' (Forannán, abbot of Armagh, was taken prisoner by the *gennti* in Cluain Comarda with his relics and his following, and was brought to the ships of Limerick).[178] He returned with the relics the following year: 'Forindan, abbas Aird Machae, du tiachtain a tiribh Muman co minnaibh Patraicc' (Forannán, abbot of Armagh, came from the lands of Munster with the relics of Patrick).[179] The altercation recorded in the list of the coarbs of Patrick, therefore, could be interpreted as representing a time when Diarmait's position was not recognized, despite the fact that he displayed the symbols of authority of the heir of Patrick — the insignia of Armagh.[180] A truce of sorts was perhaps resolved in 842 when the two abbots travelled to Munster to promulgate Patrick's Law: 'Cáin Phatraic co Mumain la Forannán 7 la Diarmat' (The Law of Patrick brought to Munster by Forannán and by Diarmait).[181]

This conflict was the culmination of a prolonged period of unrest at Armagh characterized by contention over the role of abbot and heir of Patrick. Before Diarmait and Forannán, Artrí and Éogan were in dispute over the abbacy, a struggle that ended in a military battle.[182] A possible explanation for the 'destabilization' of Armagh between about 750 and 850 may be the shift from Southern Uí Néill dominance, as indicated in the writings of Tírechán and Muirchú, to increasing Cenél nEogain dominance from the north, in the ninth century. The struggle between these two divisions in the interim may have weakened the overall Uí Néill position in Armagh. This made room for the Ulaid from the east and the Uí Chremthainn from the west to further their ambitions, even though they ultimately failed in their efforts. Furthermore, McCone argues that there may have been an element of desperation in the efforts of the Uí Chremthainn, since Cenél nEogain control would have posed a more serious threat to Airgiallan autonomy than Southern Uí Néill influence.[183]

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[177] *AU*, *s.a.* 836. For context, see Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn', pp. 52–53.

[178] *AU*, *s.a.* 845.

[179] *AU*, *s.a.* 846.

[180] For further discussion of the ecclesiastical politics at issue here, see Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention'.

[181] *AI*, *s.a.* 842.

[182] Haggart, 'Abbatial Contention', pp. 48–55.

[183] McCone, 'Clones', p. 319.

Throughout this tumultuous period, then, relics were respected, venerated, marketed, and defamed. A more detailed and comprehensive examination of the political context of the use of relics in the late eighth and ninth centuries would reveal much, and it is regrettable that such a study has not been possible here. Nevertheless, it is clear that relics impacted greatly on the interactions between the secular and ecclesiastical elite within society. This is especially apparent in the actions of rival claimants to the Armagh abbacy, each of whom appreciated the power that was invested in the insignia of Patrick. While the man physically located in Armagh could base his claim upon that presence, the absent or expelled opponent — whether Eógan, Diarmait, or Forannán — could use Patrick's insignia as authentication of his claims. McCone makes an insightful comparison with a later period of church history: 'On the Continent the famous maxim *ubi papa, ibi Roma* was coined to justify the Avignon popes' position. In effect, these Armagh abbots in exile were using a similar logic: *ubi heres Patricii, ibi sedes Patricii*.'[184]

[184] McCone, 'Clones', p. 319.

Conclusions

This study set out to provide an overall assessment of the role of relics in the Irish Church and to provide a more rounded understanding of their function in the Church and its interaction with society. Such an appreciation is impossible to garner solely from narrow detailed studies of very specific areas, though these analyses are also needed. The focus has, therefore, been on the documentary sources and on providing a general historical analysis of the evolution of the cult of relics in Ireland from the earliest sources (predominantly seventh century) until the ninth century. This time frame has provided a useful and easily discernible outline of the evolution of the cult of relics in Ireland, in tandem with the increasingly authoritative role played by the Church in Irish society. Furthermore, since the positioning of the 'Irish' cult of relics within the broader Church is so important, the analysis has been supported by an exploration of the cult of relics, in general, on the Continent. An attempt has been made to weave together cultural, political, and devotional themes, and to compare the Irish experience with continental developments. This monograph is, therefore, placed within two currently distinct spheres: the study of early Irish history and the study of the cult of relics.

Perhaps the most important outcome of these investigations has been that the evidence reveals the continuity in practice between the Irish Church, in the early period, and its continental counterparts. This is especially true in relation to the cult of relics. The notion that the Irish Church was unique and original, developing at odds with the Roman model has now been all but abandoned. Nevertheless, vestiges of such an interpretation survive, particularly in relation to the veneration of corporeal relics. In order to interrogate these views in detail Chapters 2 and 3 focused predominantly on the early cult of relics in Ireland, with a particular emphasis on bodily remains. This analysis provides a more holistic understanding of the cult of relics by attempting to reconcile the material evidence and arguments put forward by archaeologists, with the earli-

est written sources. The examination of tomb cults and the practice of *transla-tio* has produced a more nuanced understanding of the role of saintly remains in the early Irish Church. The documentary examples, though few, demonstrate the importance of corporeal relic cults to the authors of our earliest surviving documents and, accordingly, may mark pivotal moments in the evolution of the Irish Church. For example, the role of *ferta* provides interesting insights into the function of corporeal remains and the interface between pre-Christian society and the Church. We have references to a number of Christian burial sites incorporating this term, an explicit definition by Tírechán, and descriptions of *ferta* as boundary markers in the law texts. Tírechán's explanation of a *fert* indicates that the term itself, and the type of burial it denotes, was in the process of being Christianized. The burial evidence and the language reveal the importance of the physical remains of key individuals and ancestors in early Irish society. The role of the corporeal relics of the Christian saint was assimilated to this pre-existing cultural setting.

Muirchú's account of the death and burial of Monesan is also thought provoking, as it fills out the picture of early Irish relic cults and veneration. The ostensible contradictions between this account and the archaeological evidence, which suggests a separation of liturgical and reliquary focus, indicates that Irish church practice was not homogenous. Furthermore, the comparative lack of literary references to miracles taking place at saints' graves contrasts with the relative abundance of archaeological evidence for devotional pilgrimage activity at tombs on early ecclesiastical sites. Again, this underlines the importance of considering all the available evidence as a whole, and indicates that the cult of relics was a complex, yet fundamental, part of the early Irish Church. Further analysis of particular sites could produce evidence to indicate that the archaeological and documentary sources are not necessarily contradictory. The apparent inconsistencies may be down to regional variations, and further detailed multidisciplinary analysis of individual cults would prove useful in this regard.

The exploration of church consecration, provided in Chapter 4, reveals how the cult of relics became intrinsically linked with liturgical practice. The role of relics in church consecration provides a useful avenue for research since the evidence, while sparse, comes from a variety of different sources. Through an analysis of the legal material, annals, and hagiography, in conjunction with the archaeological evidence, it is possible effectively to place Irish customs within continental and early Christian contexts. However, the evidence is sporadic and patently thinner than the continental sources. More archaeological research may alter or corroborate the current findings. A greater grasp of the role of *leachta* on Irish sites would, doubtless, enhance our understanding.

Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that relics were vital to church consecration in Ireland and emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between relics and the altar. The examination of church consecration demonstrates the important role of Roman contact relics in the Irish Church. The sources suggest that these relics were often used in place of the corporeal relics of local saints, in line with the practice of some churches on the Continent.

The increasing practical application of the cult of relics is revealed in Chapters 5 and 6. The use of relics for oath taking, exacting tributes, settling legal disputes, and formalizing various types of contract indicates that the cult of relics became a useful instrument for the Church. The references to these uses of relics reveal interesting insights into the Church's interaction with the wider world. The versatile nature, and popular appeal, of the cult of relics clearly facilitated the Church as it solidified its position in society. We can also clearly perceive that relics were key to the identity and reputation of a church. They were such an intrinsic component in the cult of the saint that the quality and quantity of the relics, and by extension the personality and status of the patron, helped shape the identity of individual communities.

By the ninth century, then, the cult of relics was firmly established in the Irish Church and society. The increasing prevalence of relic circuits in the annals in the eighth and ninth centuries reflected the evolution of the organization of the Church and its evolving status within society. The phenomenon may also be a reflection of the ever-growing issue of jurisdiction among churches and between the Church and secular authorities that was being clarified and codified at this time.[1] While the seventh-century sources emphasize the role of relics in preserving *romanitas* and late antique ideals, as the eighth century progressed relics were increasingly being used as tools of power and control within the Church. The cult of relics became a convenient conduit through which the Church could engage with society. We can, therefore, observe an increasing emphasis on associative relics and *minna* in the annals. For this reason, an analysis of references to relics in the earliest sources in Irish history is a useful prism through which to view the development of the Irish Church. It was the role of associative relics as insignia of communities that contributed to the popularity of this category of relics. These *minna* were representations of authority and control to the elite, and objects of popular devotion to the faithful. However, their association with the patron saint was where they originally attained their power. This facet of the cult of relics emphasizes the importance

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[1] See Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, chap. 5.

of the relics of the patron saint to the identity of the community. The saint was the community's temporal and spiritual representative in heaven as well as on earth. Not only was the community's identity tied to the saint, but also their fortunes. Above all, relics were a component in the creation of a saint. At a fundamental level the power of relics was inextricably linked with the power and identity of the saint.

This symbiosis of cult creation and political advancement is very well expressed in the cults of early Irish saints, such as Brigit, Columba, and Patrick. The analysis provided above reveals that Armagh, in particular, was very astute at harnessing and displaying the power of relics. The prominence of Armagh in this work is partly reflective of the fact that, as the head of the Irish Church, Armagh naturally dominates the extant early sources. Nevertheless, I would also argue that it was Armagh's use of relics that facilitated this supremacy in the first place. Armagh fully exploited the potential of relics to unite, bind, and control. Indeed, this awareness is evident through the centuries. Rival abbots of Armagh in the early ninth century understood that he who holds the relics holds the keys to power. The use of relics by these churches shows that relics were crucial tools in communication. Relics could represent ancient bonds, new loyalties, continuing conflicts, and age-old rivalries. An important element here is that relics were symbols of authority and control. This is perhaps one of the main differences between popular devotion of relics in any context, from the ancient Greeks to Elvis, and the cult of relics in the early Church.

However, we must not adopt an overly cynical view of the role of relics in early medieval Ireland, or indeed, in general. The enduring power of the cult of relics, despite increasing criticism of the hierarchy, power, and control of the Catholic Church, reflects the inherent appeal of the cult of relics to the lay community. The Church facilitates and accommodates this need. And, while there are distinct benefits to controlling this devotion, we can assume that many clerics believed just as fervently in the intercessory power of the saints as the pilgrims that flocked to the shrines. The Church harnessed, rather than created, the cults of saints and relics. While some cults were 'invented' by ambitious church leaders, such as Ambrose of Milan, others evolved at a local level out of the commemoration of a respected religious community leader or an inspiring devout individual. Over time, certain men and women grew in the public consciousness as effective patrons and mediators. The evolution of early cults is difficult to grasp. John Blair calls attention to this issue in relation to the Anglo-Saxon Church. He explains that saints 'were "made" through a combination of monastic activities and grass-roots veneration, and whether a revered individual was or was not a saint must often have been rather vague at the

time'.[2] In relation to the Irish material we have seen that the esteemed ancestor was already a powerful patron in pre-Christian Ireland, and the Christian saint seems to have fitted into this environment without too much upheaval.

The nature of history, especially for the early period when the surviving evidence is relatively scant, tends to provide a 'top-down' view of society. The extant documentary sources were most likely commissioned or funded by the more powerful and influential members of society and, thus, are witnesses to their attitudes, aspirations, and inner workings. The use of relics to secure affiliation, jurisdiction, and revenue, therefore, comes to the fore in the early Irish sources. Popular beliefs and ritual practices are more difficult to comprehend and outline. However, we can infer from the layout of early Irish ecclesiastical sites and the variety of tomb shrines, especially the early slab shrines, that pilgrimage to the sites of corporeal relics was an important facet of popular devotion. As Geary has emphasized, there is no inherent value in relics. Their worth was a social construct based on a communal acceptance that saintly remains belonged to an individual with an intimate connection with God, and that this individual's essence survived in the relics.[3] The thaumaturgic power of relics was only one element in the cult. 'Their ability to substitute for public authority, protect and secure the community, determine the relative status of individuals and churches, and provide for the community's economic prosperity', ensured a lasting role for relics within the medieval Church and society.[4] There appears to be a juxtaposition between the seemingly innate human appeal of tangible items like relics, that can provide reassurance and facilitate intercession on the one hand, and the deliberate use, and sometimes exploitation, of this belief by the church hierarchy on the other.

The overarching nature of this study has necessarily limited the amount of detail provided in certain areas. Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions can be drawn. A focus on the earliest period has revealed many characteristics held in common with the continental Church. Indeed, though the evidence is certainly thinner than for other jurisdictions, I would argue that the sources indicate that the Irish Church was attempting to follow church norms, such as they were. A key issue here is one of chronology. The earliest period, for which our documentary sources are comparatively scarce and our archaeological evidence difficult to date, seems to indicate the strongest adherence to continental prac-

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[2] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 142.

[3] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 201.

[4] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 205–06.

tices. However, the standards of the Church were evolving in the same period. It is perhaps somewhat of a misnomer to refer to any standard church practices in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. In Rome, a succession of popes shaped church policy over centuries. In the 'provinces', enterprising bishops and church leaders pioneered practices that were not always officially sanctioned by Rome. The date at which associative relics become important varies from region to region, as do the formal contexts provided for their veneration. It is essential that these patterns be thoroughly interrogated for what they can tell us about the particular character of Christianity, and indeed society, in different regions. The Irish Church was anything but monolithic, and an examination of the cult of relics has revealed great diversity. There was possibly even variation between smaller geographic areas in Ireland as relics fulfilled different roles in response to different needs.

Another outcome of this research has been that, understandably, the methodology used to study the topic and the type of evidence analysed can often produce different results. Ultimately, the only satisfactory approach is an interdisciplinary one. Perhaps the most effective way of achieving this is by means of a cooperative project, in which specialists in various fields work in tandem to produce a new model by which to fully understand the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland. While I have attempted to reconcile both the material and documentary evidence, my main aim in this study has been to make a contribution to the field from a historical angle, thus complementing the existing archaeological and art historical studies. Language provides an exciting avenue for future research. Chronology has been an important aspect here. Texts in Irish confidently dated to the early Irish period and Hiberno-Latin sources dated to the sixth to ninth centuries comprise the bulk of the material examined in the current study. This firmly places the analysis within an early time frame. The examination has shown that the introduction of Latin to Ireland, combined with the pre-existing vernacular culture, produced a relatively large proliferation of terms for relics in early Ireland. This combination allows for a linguistic examination of the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland, which is not possible for many other areas of Europe. The vernacular texts reveal that native and imported terms for relics were used interchangeably. The Appendix illustrates how the Latin terms and their Irish derivatives have been more difficult to categorize. However, the native vernacular terms for relics highlight the real distinctions between different categories of relics in the Irish Church. For example, the long episode in the *Vita Tripartita* concerning Patrick's disciple Muinis of Forgney (Co. Longford) displays the use of a variety of different terms for relics. Over the course of a few pages the author chose the term *mind*

to denote man-made relics, such as a crosier and Gospel book-cover, whereas the terms *taise*, *reilci*, and *martrai* are used in the same episode to describe corporeal remains, the relics of 'elders', and the Roman martyrs, respectively.[5] An overall analysis of the terms for relics in the *Vita Tripartita* reveals nuances within the vocabulary of relics. Although this text is a problematic source, especially in relation to dating, further analysis of it may prove fruitful in relation to a more in-depth lexicographical analysis of the cult of relics in Ireland — since this one text uses nearly all the available vocabulary. Indeed, an examination of the hagiography of Irish saints up until the twelfth century, which encompasses the large corpus of lives composed in Irish, would potentially provide a very useful comparative linguistic analysis.

Notwithstanding the ostensibly inconsistent evidence provided by the *Vita Tripartita*, I would propose that the term *taise* was used by Irish scribes to denote a dead body or corporeal remains. This is supported by the use of *taise* and *mind* in the same episode in the *Life of Máedóc of Ferns*.[6] Although this text dates from centuries after our period it still provides a good indication of the semantic range in this area.[7] In this passage Máedóc bequeathes many of his collected relics to the community of Ferns. The hagiographer uses the term *mionn* to refer to the following: the staff (*bachall*) of Brandub; two bells; and his wonder-working reliquary (*meinistir*). On the other hand, *taise* is used to denote 'the relics of the saints and patriarchs, of the martyr Stephen, and Lawrence, and Clement, the ankle of Martin, and some of the hair of the Virgin Mary, and many other relics of saints and holy virgins besides' (do thaisibh na naomh 7 na nuasal-aithreach .i. taisi Steafain mairtir, 7 Laurint, 7 Clemint, 7 ina bfuil mudhorn Martan, 7 cuid d'folt Maire, maille morán do thaisibh na naomh 7 na naomh-ogh arcena).[8] More thorough research and detailed statistical analysis is needed. Unfortunately, an undertaking of this magnitude is beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions may be posited. We can potentially equate the term *mind* with associative or secondary relics and the word *taise* with corporeal relics. Furthermore, for example, by equating the term *minna* with insignia, the Irish texts are revealing that these items were

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[5] *Bethu Phátraic*, ed. by Mulchrone, pp. 51–53.

[6] *Betha Máedóc Ferna II*, ed. by Plummer, 231–33 (p. 266).

[7] See Gillespie, 'The Making of O'Rourke', pp. 48–68 on the dating of this text in its present forms.

[8] *Betha Máedóc Ferna II*, ed. by Plummer, 232 (p. 266); *BNÉ,* trans. by Plummer, ɪɪ, p. 258.

a very specific type of venerated item. They were official emblems of their community. The marked differentiation between terms for relics in the early Irish texts also demonstrates that the cult of relics was highly evolved in the Irish Church, and that there was a clear hierarchy. Above all, this study has revealed that only through an appreciation of the language of relics can the cult, as a whole, be fully understood.

At the outset I asserted that, on a social and cultural level, the use of relics is reflective of the beliefs and customs of the society in which they are venerated. What can this study, therefore, reveal about early medieval Ireland? On a basic level it is clear from the sheer quantity of evidence that relics played a routine role in the lives of early Christians, who visited the tombs of the saints on pilgrimage on feast days and in times of particular need. They turned out en masse to witness ceremonies exhibiting relics, venerated the precious shrines, and respected the spectacle of the accompanying church regalia. They touched the relics to heal ailments and garner favour. They paid taxes and tributes to their ecclesiastical and secular lords on the authority of the insignia of the saint. The archaeological evidence is particularly evocative. A visit to an early site like Temple Cronan in County Clare elucidates the fascination this cult must have held. Peering into the slab shrine to gaze at the relics of the saint one can easily comprehend the power of such a tomb shrine to those seeking, believing, and hoping for intercession from their patron saint.

Through the cult of relics communities in early Ireland were drawn together to partake in the glory of the saint. As *érlama* saints represented real and enduring ties between individuals and their ancestors and ensured the continuance of certain traditions. Kings and bishops used relics as instruments of power and control. Each member of Christian society had the opportunity for a personal relationship with the saint through relics. This can be seen from examples ranging from the small boy wishing merely to touch the hem of Columba's cloak, to the fearsome Donnchad Midi destroying the relics of Patrick. Even in modern Ireland this sentiment remains, and is expressed in the account of the visit of the relics of St Thérèse to Ireland in 2001: 'In the end, it was not about Relics, not even the Relics of a great saint. It was about people. What happened in Ireland, from Easter Sunday till 1 July 2001, was essentially a People's Movement, at its very best'.[9]

[9] Healy and McCaffrey, *St Thérèse in Ireland*, p. 127.

Terminology of the Cult of Relics in Early Medieval Ireland

Hiberno-Latin

(A) reliquiae — *'remains', 'physical remains or ashes of deceased human beings'*[1]

In classical Latin this term usually refers to corporeal remains and it is certainly used in this context in the one linguistic reference in Adomnán's *Vita S. Columbae*.[2] The term evolved in Late Antiquity and the early medieval period to denote the corporeal relics of the saints.[3] This is true for the Eastern Church. However, due to their strict laws regarding interference with the dead, the Romans used the term to refer also to items that came in contact with the body of the saint (*brandea*, *sanctuaria*, *pignora*), and were thus imbued with the saint's power. Indeed, while Columbanus extols the virtues of Rome on account of her possession of the relics of the exalted apostles Peter and Paul, he uses the terms *cineres* (ashes) and *pignora* (pledges) but never the term *reli-*

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[1] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 1558: *Reliquiae*, 'The remains, relics, ashes of a deceased person; esp. of a body that has been burned'.

[2] *VSC*, iii, 23 (p. 228): 'qui inter aliorum sancti Columbae monachorum reliquias'.

[3] Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, p. 400; Souter, *Glossary of Later Latin*, p. 348, classifies the term as 'remains of a martyr', whereas Du Cange, *Glossarium*, vi, p. R 112, claims that in the Christian Church *reliquiae* referred specifically to portions of the body, as opposed to *corpora*, entire corpses.

quiae.[4] On the other hand, Cummian explicitly refers to these Roman relics as *reliquiae*.[5] An examination of the general use of this term, in the early Irish material as a whole, simply shows that it is a non-specific term used to refer to relics, both physical remains and associative relics.

In the *Vita Patricii*, Muirchú generally uses the term *reliquiae* to signify bodily remains such as those of Patrick and Monesan.[6] Tomb cults are suggested by Muirchú's language when describing the veneration of the relics of Erc, Fiacc, and Monesan.[7] His use of the term *adorantur* with *reliquiae* suggests veneration at a very specific location, implying a grave, tomb, or other immovable burial. Indeed, his contemporary Tírechán explicitly defines what constitutes a relic, explaining that Patrick pulled out one of his own teeth in order to give Brón a relic: 'Et dedit dentem Brono suo in reliquias' (and he gave the tooth to Brón as a relic).[8] Tírechán also claims that the church of Armagh holds the relics of the martyrs Peter and Paul, Stephen, and Lawrence.[9] As the bodies of these saints remained in Rome it is likely that these were not physical remains but contact relics like *brandea*, *sanctuaria*, and *pignora*. The *Liber Angeli* refers to these same relics as *martyrum*.[10]

(B) martyr — *'witness', 'one who bears witness through death', gen. pl.* martyrum *'[relics] of the martyrs', sometimes rendered* martirum *in Hiberno-Latin*[11]

In relation to the medieval cult of relics the genitive plural of the term *martyr* is most often used. *Martyrum* 'of the martyrs', therefore, refers to martyr's remains. Early Irish authors use the term *martyrum* to denote the 'relics of the martyrs' of the early Church as is shown in two early Hiberno-Latin texts: Cummian's *De controversia Paschali* and the *Liber Angeli*.[12] 'Real' martyrdom, in the traditional understanding of the word, was not a common occurrence in early Ireland, although the *Annals of Ulster* do commemorate 'Combustio mar-

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[4] Columbanus, *Epistulae*, ed. by Walker, III, 3, l. 32 (p. 24), v, 11, l. 25 (p. 48).

[5] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, p. 94.

[6] Muirchú, II, 13.1 (p. 120), I, 27.9 (p. 100).

[7] Muirchú, 17.3 (p. 88), 19.3 (p. 92), 27.9 (p. 100).

[8] Tírechán, 45.4 (p. 158).

[9] Tírechán, II, 3.5 (p. 122).

[10] *LA*, 19 (p. 186).

[11] For example, *Hibernensis*, 44.8 (p. 177).

[12] Cummian, *De controversia Paschali*, ed. by Walsh and Ó Cróinín, p. 94; *LA*, 19 (p. 186).

tirum Ega' (the burning of the martyrs of Eigg).[13] Irish monks embraced self-exile as a form of martyrdom and as an alternative to martyrdom by death.[14] In fact, there is evidence to suggest that, although ideas of non-literal martyrdom originated on the Continent, it was the Irish who created a three-tier categorization of martyrs into red, white, and blue. This categorization is preserved in the *Cambrai Homily*, composed in the seventh or eighth centuries.[15] Red or 'bloody' martyrdom is self-explanatory and consists of being killed or dying in the name of the Lord. White martyrs were those who gave up their lives completely for God, not by death but by social exclusion and withdrawal from the world. Blue, or green, martyrdom (*glasmartre*) required labour, abstinence, self-denial, and commitment to an ascetic life.[16] According to the *Hibernensis* there is no difference between martyrs and baptized people. Quoting a 'Nicaean synod', the canonists claim, 'Inter confessionem baptismi et confessionem sanguinis non discernimus martyrium ubi tota baptismi sacramenta continentur' (We do not distinguish between the confession of baptism and the confession of blood. Martyrdom is where all the sacraments of baptism are contained).[17]

The term *martyrum*, denoting martyrial relics, is used often in the early Irish sources in relation to the cult of relics. The *Hibernensis* explains *martyrum* as 'hoc est reliquiarum'[18] and this is borne out by the *Annals of Ulster*, which seems to use the terms interchangeably.[19] However, there may have been a distinction between these terms that is not now easily discernible. Perhaps the chronological sequence of the annalistic references can shed some light on the language. There is a break in the use of the Latin term *martirum* (*martirio*, etc.) between the years 776 and 825, when *reliquiae* takes over as the Latin term denoting relics. Scholarly work on the nature and content of the corpus of annalistic mate-

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[13] *AU, s.a.* 617. See also *AU, s.a.* 727: 'Conall mac Moudain martirio coronatus' (Conall, son of Moudán, was crowned with martyrdom).

[14] See Hillers, 'Voyages between Heaven and Hell', p. 68; Clancy, 'Subversion at Sea', p. 199.

[15] *Cambrai Homily*, ed. by Stokes and Strachan; *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 244–47; Ó Néill, 'Background to the *Cambrai Homily*', pp. 146–47; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 292.

[16] Follett, *Céli Dé*, pp. 54–56; Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom'.

[17] *Hibernensis*, 49.2 (p. 204). I am grateful to Roy Flechner for helping me translate this passage.

[18] *Hibernensis*, 49.5 (p. 205).

[19] *AU, s.a.* 734, 743, 776: *martirum*, 784, 785, 790, 793, 794: *reliquarum*.

rial in Ireland has indicated that there was a discernible shift in the nature of the annal entries in this period.[20]

Other references to *martyrum* in the texts perhaps indicate antiquity, implying that the term was used not only to denote the contact relics of Roman martyrs, but also the corporeal remains of the early missionaries in Ireland. This seems to be the implication of some references in the Patrician texts of the *Book of Armagh* to 'a grave mound of the martyrs' (fertae martyrum).[21]

***(C) martyrium** — 1. 'martyrdom'; 2. 'martyr's grave or edifice built at site of martyrdom', 'church building containing saintly remains', 'a site which bears witness to a key event in early Christianity'; pl.* martyria

In late Latin *martyrium* often referred to literal martyrdom, and though this usage was rare in Hiberno-Latin, there are some attestations.[22] Architecturally, the Latin *martyrium* was used in Late Antiquity to denote a place containing a martyr's physical remains.[23] As early Christianity developed, *martyrium* simply referred to the burial place of the saint or a church that contained important relics. Isidore of Seville explained: 'martyrium locus martyrum Graeca derivatione, eo quod in memoria martyris sit constructum, vel quod sepulchra sanctorum ibi sint martyrum' (a *martyrium* is a place of martyrs derived from Greek, as each is built in memory of a martyr or because the tombs of the saints there are those of martyrs).[24] Similarly, in his *De locis sanctis*, Adomnán displays a detailed understanding of the close connections between *martyria* and basilicas as burial places of the martyrs and saints.[25]

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[20] For example, Smyth, 'The Earliest Irish Annals', p. 29, argues that the change and increase in documentation *c.* 780 was due to the commencement of an annalistic record at Clonard. For an overview of the debate and an analysis of the nature of the chronicles at this time, see Evans, *Medieval Irish Chronicles*, pp. 1–6.

[21] Muirchú, I, 24.2 (p. 108); *LA*, 31 (p. 190). Discussed in detail above, chap. 2.

[22] For example, see *Hibernensis*, 49.2 (p. 204).

[23] See Grabar, *Martyrium*, I, esp. chap. 4; Krautheimer, 'Mensa-Coemeterium-Martyrium'; Ward-Perkins, 'Memoria'.

[24] Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, XV, 4.12.

[25] For example, Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. by Meehan, I, 6 (pp. 48, 50). For discussion, see O'Loughlin, 'Perceiving Palestine in Early Christian Ireland', pp. 127–31.

Vernacular terms — borrowed from Latin

(A) martar/martir — Latin martyr; 'martyr', in plural often 'relics of martyrs'

McManus has shown that this term was part of the 'Primitive Irish' lexicon.[26] 'Primitive Irish' represents the Irish language from the earliest period up to the apocope of final syllables. *Martar* is the earliest form of the borrowing from Latin.[27] *The Tract on the Mass* in the Stowe Missal uses the term *martar* to refer to martyrs.[28]

The word is sometimes associated with toponyms. Tírechán, Muirchú, the *Liber Angeli*, the *Annals of Ulster*, and the *Vita Tripartita* all refer to such places.[29] For example, the *Annals of Ulster* record the deaths of Faelán of Martarthech[30] and Fiachra of Martharthech.[31] Hogan associates this site with a location northwest of Navan.[32] According to Tírechán, Patrick established a place named *Domus Martirum* in the north of Leinster in Druimm Urchaille (Dunmurraghil, Co. Kildare),[33] and he also founded a church in Roigne of the 'Martorthech'.[34] Most likely this use comes from the Latin *martyrium* above. The etymology would, therefore, suggest that these references to a 'house of martyrs' denote places containing physical remains of the saints, with the inclusion of a form of the term *martar* indicating antiquity or an association with Roman martyrial contact relics.[35]

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[26] *DIL*, 2012 M 66.30; McManus, 'Latin Loan-Words', p. 66.

[27] McManus, 'Latin Loan-Words', p. 66.

[28] *Thes. Pal.*, ɪɪ, 254.9.

[29] *LA*, 31 (p. 190); Muirchú, ɪ, 24.2 (p. 108). This place name also occurs in Wales. See Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', pp. 141–44; Owen, 'Some Welsh Words', p. 257.

[30] *AU*, *s.a.* 722 'Faelan Martarthaigi, Sidal Droma Laidggin mortui sunt'.

[31] *AU*, *s.a.* 755 'Mors Fiachrach Martarthaighe'.

[32] Hogan, *Onomasticon Góidelicum*, p. 536.7

[33] Tírechán, 51.2 (p. 162); Charles-Edwards, *Chronicle*, ɪ, 195.

[34] Tírechán, 51.4 (p. 162).

[35] See also *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, ed. by Breatnach, 3 (pp. 8–9), for a reference to a *martarlaic*, 'tomb shrine'. See discussion in chaps 2 and 4 above.

(B) *martre* — *Latin* martyrium, martyrii*; 'martyrdom', 'violent death';*
gen. pl. martrae

Although literal martyrdom was rare in medieval Ireland, the sources do use the term *martre* to signify the martyrdom of early Christians.[36] For example, *Félire Óengusso* refers to 'La féil Petair deochain drebraing martrai mbúade' (the feast of Peter the deacon who advanced to victorious martyrdom).[37] Furthermore, in the Viking period the annals record instances of clerics suffering a violent death or being martyred. The *Annals of Ulster* document 'the martyrdom of Blathmac son of Flann at the hands of the *gennti* in Iona of Columba' *s.a.* 825 (Martre Blaimhicc mic Flainn o genntib in hI Coluim Cille). Occasionally in the later Irish sources *martre*, like its Latin equivalent, came to mean violent deaths or slaughter in a more general sense.

(C) *reilic* — *Latin* reliquiae*; pl.* reilce/reilgi/reilci *'saint's remains'; sing.* reilic *'grave/cemetery'*

While the Old Irish term *reilic* is also imported directly from Latin, it is used in early Ireland in two different forms and contexts. This makes the word an intriguing candidate for examination, because it may shed light on the nature of the cult of relics in the specific Irish milieu.[38] Coming from the Latin *reliquiae*, it is, naturally, used to refer to saints' relics in its plural form, as in the *Vita Tripartita*.[39] One of the earliest examples of this is in *Bretha Nemed Toísech*.[40] Likewise, *Félire Oengusso* glorifies the feast of the 'nóebreilce núasal' (noble holy relics) on 1 October.[41] The scribe of a gloss on this entry was confused as to whether this records the arrival of the relics of the early martyrs Peter and Paul, Stephen, and Lawrence in Armagh, the completion of Máelruain's reliquary, or the bringing of relics to the community of Tallaght.[42] Another ninth-century Irish reference to the term *reilci* may indicate that it was used to denote

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[36] *DIL*, 2012 M 66.62.

[37] *Félire*, 17 April (p. 107).

[38] *DIL*, 2012 R 35.12.

[39] *Bethu Phátraic*, l. 893 (p. 51), l. 913 (p. 52), l. 929 (p. 52), l. 1989 (p. 101), l. 2823 (p. 142), l. 2992 (p. 149).

[40] *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, ed. by Breatnach, 3 (pp. 8–9, 11). Discussed above, chap. 4.

[41] *Félire*, 1 October (p. 214).

[42] *Félire*, p. 220.

corporeal relics. The *Annals of Ulster* record that Bangor was attacked and the 'reilgi Comghaill' (relics of Comgall) were shaken from their shrine in 824, and a poem appended to the entry in the annals indicates that *reilgi* here referred to the bones of the saint.[43]

However, the most convincing evidence for the association of this term with corporeal relics in Ireland is that the earliest uses are actually in the singular form, *reilic*, and are not usually applied to saints' relics but to a cemetery, hence the modern Irish *reilig*. Indeed, our earliest reference to *reilic* includes an attempt to explain the meaning and evolution of the term. Tírechán uses the term in the sense of a graveyard in an episode referring to the pagan burial of Ethne and Fedelm, daughters of King Loíguire. He writes that the heathen Irish call this burial a *ferta* but he calls it a *relic*.[44] The evidence from *Sanas Cormaic* clearly equates this term with a burial ground and with relics of the saints: 'Relic .i. a reliqui[i]s sanctorum'.[45] The use of *reilic* to denote a burial ground was surely influenced by the custom of swearing oaths on relics and in cemeteries, which is provided for in several of the vernacular law texts.[46]

The two distinct uses for the one term *reilic* (the plural indicating saints' relics and the singular meaning a burial place or graveyard) may be an early Irish linguistic reflection of the Irish Church's appreciation of the hierarchy of relics, since the earliest use of the term referred to the primary *locus* of a saint, the location of his body.

Vernacular terms — native

(A) taise — 'dead body', 'corpse', 'remains', 'relics'

The Old Irish term *taise* is used in some early contexts to mean a dead body or corpse and an alternative use of the term means softness, weakness, dampness, or moisture.[47] An association with a decomposing body would not be hard to make. Indeed, *O'Mulconry's Glossary* equates the term *taise* with a body as an

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[43] Discussed above, chap. 3.

[44] Tírechán, 26.20 (p. 144). Discussed above, chap. 3.

[45] *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. by Meyer, p. 98.

[46] Discussed above, chap. 5.

[47] *DIL*, 2012 T 52, 53. For example, see later hagiographical texts such as the *Betha Máedóc Ferna I*, ed. by Plummer, I, 35 (p. 189), where *taise* denotes dampness/moisture, and the *Life of Colmán Elo*, ed. by Plummer, 16 (p. 172), in which *taise* denotes a softness or faintness.

explanation for the difficult term 'sithlach': 'sithlach .i. corp nó taisi' (sithlach. i.e. body or remains).[48] Similarly, a gloss on the Old Irish verse *Sanctán's hymn* uses *taise* to denote a corpse: 'ní harda lí tassi forum' (may it not put the colour of a corpse on me).[49] The abundance of Latin terms and Latin loan words denoting relics may account for the relative scarcity of the term *taise* in the earliest sources. However, it is used to refer to saints' remains in the laws, the Old Irish glosses, the annals, *Félire Oengusso*, and in later hagiography. For example, a later gloss in the Heptads refers to 'taisi na naem' (relics of the saints) as sanctifying a site and increasing its value.[50] Another law text explains that an *andoit* is a place in which the *taisi* of the kin of the *érlam* or patron are located: 'annoit .i. a mbi taisi inn erloma' (*annoit* i.e. in which are the relics of the patron).[51] Furthermore, a verse in the epilogue to *Félire Oengusso* marries the association of the term *taise* with both saints' relics and decaying remains: 'Co mbad hed no gessed don Chommdid co mmaissi, míl úre ní promfat, ní lobfat a thaissi' (Provided this be what he pray to the Lord with beauty, the beasts of the clay will not prove him, his relics will not decay).[52]

Taise is the most common term for relics in the *Vita Tripartita* and in this text it is often used specifically to denote physical remains. The contexts are very revealing. When Assicus, the disciple of Patrick, died, he was buried in Ráth Cungi, Donegal, 'where lie his remains' (Attát a thaissi i Ráith Chungai).[53] The corresponding episode in Tírechán confirms that these were corporeal relics as he writes that the bones of Assicus are buried in Mag Sereth in Ráth Cungi: 'sunt ossa eius in campo Sered hirRaith Chungi'.[54] *Taise* is also the term selected by the author of the *Vita Tripartita* to refer to the bodily remains of the girls Ethne and Fedelm (taissi inna n-ingen),[55] who were in a 'pagan' barrow, and also to the remains of St Patrick.[56] In an intriguing gloss in a copy of *Vita Tripartita* contained in TCD MS H.3.18 (MS 1337), 'reilgi' is annotated

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[48] 'O'Mulconry's Glossary', ed. by Stokes, p. 273.

[49] *Thes. Pal.*, ii, 352.18.

[50] *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, v, 124.

[51] *CIH*, iii, 979.17.

[52] *Félire*, Epilogue, ll. 217–20 (p. 274).

[53] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 1088–89 (p. 60).

[54] Tírechán, 22.4 (p. 140).

[55] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 1165–66 (p. 64); Tírechán, 26.21 (p. 144) terms the remains *relic* and *residuae*.

[56] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2991–93 (p. 149).

as 'taisi' and not the other way around.[57] This is perhaps an attempt on behalf of the glossator to differentiate between the two terms, indicating that *taise* referred to corporeal remains. This context and the proliferation of terms for relics in early Ireland may explain why *reilig* came to mean graveyard or burial and not relics. Nevertheless, the *Vita Tripartita* also presents some potentially negative evidence for the definitive equation of this term *taise* solely with corporeal remains, in that the term is also used in the text in relation to the relics of Peter and Paul left by Palladius.[58] In fact the term is used elsewhere in the *Vita Tripartita* to refer to martyrial or apostolic relics.[59] Given the general contextual uses of the term *taise* discussed here, the etymology may indicate that these contact relics were considered representative of the actual corporeal remains of Peter and Paul.

(B) mind/minn — originally *'distinguishing badge', 'emblem of rank'; correlates with Latin* insignia *'ensign', 'mark', 'symbol', 'badge of office'; 'associative/secondary relic'*

Mind appears to be another native term and is the most common vernacular word used for relics in the early Irish texts, originally meaning a distinguishing badge or emblem of rank.[60] The term *mind* is used several times in the Old Irish glosses, where it repeatedly explicates the Latin term *insignia*, for example in the Milan glosses on the Psalms.[61] The Latin term *insigne* (pl. *insignia*) 'mark, emblem, symbol, ensign, badge' is rendered in modern English as insignia (sg. and pl.) and refers to emblematic symbols or objects representing a sign of office or rank. As such, *minna* in the early Irish Church usually took the form of associative relics such as various sacred and ecclesiastical articles, like chalices, bells, books, and crosiers. For example, the references to *minna* in the sources, discussed above, Chapter 5, often refer to symbolic items of authority. The 'Book of Cuanu' interpolation in the *Annals of Ulster* refers to a chalice, Gospel, and bell as *minna*.[62] Furthermore, an episode in the *Vita Tripartita*

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[57] See Stokes, 'Glossed Extracts from the Tripartite Life', p. 20 nos 46, 47.

[58] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 295–96 (p. 19).

[59] See also *Bethu Phátraic*, l. 2810 (p. 141).

[60] *DIL*, 2012 M 143.

[61] *Thes. Pal.*, I, 24.32. See also pp. 49.24, 87.26, 441.26.

[62] *AU, s.a.* 553. Discussed above, chap. 5.

specifically refers to a crosier as a *mind*.[63] The text indicates that this type of relic was man made or enshrined. We are informed that Patrick left a number of *minna* with his disciple Muinis in Forgney (Co. Longford), including an item referred to as *Donaide Matha*, which was made with Patrick's own hand,[64] and a relic that is the likeness of the case of the Book of John.[65]

The vernacular literature corroborates the equation of the term *mind* with a symbol of authority — whether religious or lay. The saga tales signify that the term was used to denote a precious item worn on the head, indicating the wearing of a type of crown among early Irish royalty. The *Mind Óir* was apparently the chief of all these items. A *mind* was clearly a crown of some sort in the Irish saga tale *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Ailill is portrayed as wearing a *mind* on his head as a symbol of his authority.[66] When Ailill sent a jester in his stead to meet Cú Chulainn, in order that he should fool Cú Chulainn, he made the jester wear 'mind ríg fora c[h]ind' (a king's crown on his head), as a disguise.[67] *Lebor na hUidre*, although a late manuscript, also mentions this custom of wearing a *mind* as a headpiece. In the account of the birth of Áed Sláine we are told that Mairenn, one of the high king of Tara's queens, wore a *mind* of gold upon her head to conceal her baldness: 'ar is amlaid boí Mairend cen folt conid mind rigna no bid oc foloch a lochta'.[68] Earlier scholars were greatly concerned with the actual form this precious item took, in particular how it was differentiated from other items of adornment such as the 'land' (lunula) or crescent. In his detailed nineteenth-century study of dress and ornaments in early Ireland, Eugene O'Curry concluded that it 'invariably covered or surrounded the whole of the head' and in this respect differed from the 'land' or crescent.[69] Patrick Joyce likewise explored the *mind* as an item of personal adornment, translating the term as 'diadem'.[70] He, too, concluded that this item was a crown that covered the whole head. This kind of headdress may have resembled something along the lines of the Petrie crown (National Museum of Ireland). An alternative representation of the form

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[63] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 906–11 (p. 52).

[64] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 941–42 (p. 53). See full quotation above, chap. 4.

[65] *Bethu Phátraic*, l. 944 (p. 53).

[66] For example, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ed. by O'Rahilly, l. 2150 (p. 66), ll. 3321–24 (p. 100), l. 2484 (p. 76).

[67] *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ll. 1593–94 (p. 49).

[68] *Lebor na hUidre*, ed. by Best and Bergin, l. 4224 (p. 133).

[69] O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, p. 193.

[70] Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*, ii, 251.

of this headpiece can be found in a carving on the Durrow high cross, which appears to depict a native crown worn by an Irish king. This image has been reproduced by Margaret Stokes, who incorrectly termed the artefact a *lunula*.[71] Joseph Loth was also interested in the differentiation between a *mind* and a crescent or *lunula*.[72] He claimed that the French translation of *mind* to 'couronne' was much more satisfactory than the English 'diadem'.[73]

Relics were characteristic emblems of martyrdom and sanctity and in this regard were emblems of rank in the same way as, for example, crowns in secular society. In the Christian Church, therefore, it seems that the term *mind* may have been adapted and used to mean relic or venerated object, as these were symbols of the saint and his community. It is this function of a *mind* as a badge or emblem of rank that links the term with the Latin *insignia* and from here to the more general 'relic'. It is this administrative and political role of *minna* as insignia that ultimately led to the use of relics for swearing oaths and binding contracts in the Church, and this is clearly reflected in early Irish law. Of all the vocabulary for relics used in the Irish sources from the fifth to ninth centuries, the term *mind* is in fact the one Irish term that refers to this quasi-legal or official use.

(C) *fethal* — 'that which indicates'[74]; 'characteristic badge', 'emblem', 'ornament', 'relic'[75]

The term *fethal* is used in contexts similar to the terms *minna* and *insignia*, and refers to key ecclesiastical items or emblems, indicating a link with the administrative and organizational use of relics.[76] One of the Turin glosses may support this theory since the term *ephoth* (priest's vestments) is annotated as 'fethol .i. anétach sacaird'.[77] This connotation of the term in relation to the official vestments or emblematic possessions of a high ranking individual is confirmed by a later gloss to the Heptads, where a *fethal* is listed as one of the 'Set cacha marflatha' (valuables of every great lord).[78]

[71] Stokes, *The High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow*, p. 10.

[72] See Loth, 'Croissants et Diadémes'.

[73] Loth, 'Croissants et Diadémes', p. 368.

[74] Vendryes, 'Hibernica', p. 204.

[75] *DIL*, 2012 F 103.

[76] Vendryes, 'Hibernica', p. 204.

[77] *Thes. Pal.*, I, 490.36.

[78] *CIH*, I, 35.15. For the gloss, see *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, V, 244.22. For more examples, see chap. 6 above.

Terms for reliquaries, shrines, and graves

(A) basilica — 'royal house', 'church that held relics'

The origin of the Latin term *basilica* came from the Greek *basilike*, 'hall', short for *basilike oikía*, 'a royal house'. This was often the main public building for public activities such as commerce and courts. These buildings were appropriated in Christian times. In Late Antiquity the term *basilica* was used to denote churches containing the bodies of martyrs, and subsequently those of the saints.[79] In this way it was perhaps distinct from the term *ecclesia* used by Gregory of Tours to refer to a principal church. The term *ecclesia* came from the Greek word denoting a regularly convoked assembly, especially the general assembly of the Athenians. An *ecclesia* was, thus, originally a civil assembly, summoned or convened for a particular purpose, and in Christian usage referred to an assembly of the faithful. It later came to mean the Church itself and it seems that it had come to mean a church building by the time of Gregory of Tours. Gregory records an Epiphany procession from the episcopal church of Tours, the *ecclesia*, to the *sancta basilica*, which held the relics of St Martin.[80]

Adomnán makes the same distinction between *ecclesia* and *basilica* in his treatise on the holy places, where he employs the latter term to denote the building that houses the relics of saints.[81] Furthermore, the *Hibernensis*, following Isidore, explains that 'Basilion graece, rex latine, hinc et basilica, regalis, quia in primis temporibus reges tantum sepeliebantur in ea' (*Basilion* is Greek for Latin *rex*, hence *basilica* is equivalent to *regalis*, because in the earliest of times only kings were buried in it).[82] It appears then that by the early eighth century the term was associated in Ireland with an actual tomb or grave. The same text seems to equate a *basilica* with a grave that could be 'dug': 'loci ut basilicam eius foderet'.[83] Isidore explains that basilicas were royal habitations for kings, which explains their use in Christianity because a church is a place of worship to God, the king of all.[84]

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[79] Delehaye, 'Loca Sanctorum', p. 8; Doherty, 'Basilica'.

[80] Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. by Krusch and Levison, v, 4 (p. 199).

[81] Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. by Meehan, i, 6 (pp. 48, 50), i, 23–24 (pp. 64, 66, 68).

[82] *Hibernensis*, 44.20 (p. 179).

[83] *Hibernensis*, 18.7 (p. 58).

[84] Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, xv, 4 (11).

As mentioned above, Chapter 2, the term is associated with certain place names. The early reference in the *Penitential of Finnian*, combined with the likelihood that the term *basilica* referred to the earliest Irish ecclesiastical foundations, implies that the Irish understood the term in the late Latin sense of 'relic church'.[85] The *Annals of Ulster* record 'the death of Fiachrai, son of Fothad, abbot of Baislec' *s.a.* 764 (mors Fiachrach mic Fothaid abbatis Baslice). However, McManus questions whether the form actually belongs to the earlier 'Archaic Irish' period, as the loss of an internal syllable shows it to be a pre-syncope borrowing.[86] Tírechán, Cogitosus, and the *Liber Angeli* all make important early references to the term *basilica* in the Irish sources.[87]

(B) mem(m)ra — *Latin memoria 'monument', 'memorial'; 'tomb', 'tomb shrine', 'memorial church'*

The tomb shrine of the founder saint was an important focus of ritual at early church sites. These tomb shrines are sometimes referred to as *memra* in Irish texts.[88] The term refers to more than just a simple grave and may indicate the existence of relic cults in the earliest days of Christianity in Ireland.[89] The term frequently features in *Félire Óengusso* referring to the tombs of the saints.[90] It was clearly understood to have been a substantial structure because the early Irish law text *Bretha Comaithchesa* lists the construction of a *memra* (along with other specified buildings) as a viable reason for the breaking of fences: 'Ata aurba ceana nad aclaidead aurba nimfeadna saire muilind no duirthige no membra ɫ saire duin righ' (There are clearings which are not sued for; a breaking for access at the construction of a mill, or wooden church, or tomb shrine, or at the building of a king's fort).[91]

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[85] See above, chap. 2.

[86] McManus, 'Latin Loan-Words', p. 62.

[87] See above, chap. 2.

[88] *DIL*, 2012 M 98.29.

[89] See Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints', p. 144.

[90] For example, *Félire*, Prologue, 221 (p. 26); *scholia*, 9 July (p. 168); *scholia*, 24 November (p. 244).

[91] *CIH*, ɪ, 204.16–17.

(C) ruam — *O.Ir.* Róm *'Rome'*[92]*;* 'cemetery', 'burial place'

The respect for Rome as the possessor of the relics of the martyrs was so great that it was believed that the deposition of Roman soil in Irish graveyards would effectively provide a burial ground in Roman earth, thus hastening the soul's advent into heaven. The term *ruam*, therefore, evolved out of pilgrimage activity in which Irish visitors to Rome returned with soil and the relics of the saints. Patrick himself, according to the *Vita Tripartita*, travelled to Rome and cleaned out the 'Eternal City' of relics while all the inhabitants were asleep.[93] Deposition on a site was believed to produce a certain sanctifying effect. The motif of Irish saints and pilgrims bringing back soil from Rome is fairly common in later Irish hagiography. The later *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* recounts how Colmán Elo obtained the soil, when he went to Rome with Colmán maic Lúacháin and Colmán Comraire.[94] The earliest attestations to *ruam* are in the ninth century, which suggests that *reilic* was the earlier usage. *Félire Óengusso* records on 28 October that Babylon is the burial place of Sts Simon and Thaddaeus: 'Babilón ar-rúamsom, Tathae ocus Simón'.[95] The prologue to this text also uses *ruam* to refer to the great cemeteries of Kildare and Glendalough.[96] *Sanas Cormaic* simply translates the term as 'Rome' or 'a burial ground'.[97] The term took on the same meaning in Welsh: *Rufain*, 'Rome', clearly refers to a graveyard, and not to the Italian city, in some sources.[98]

(D) scrín — *Latin* scrinium *'case', 'chest'; 'shrine'*

The Irish *scrín* is a direct translation from the Latin *scrinium*. In Roman antiquity a *scrinium* was a case or box for keeping books or manuscripts. It later came to denote a case containing precious items and in the Christian Church

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[92] *Thes. Pal.*, i, 174.

[93] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2809–31 (pp. 141–42).

[94] *Betha Colmáin*, ed. by Meyer, 77 (pp. 80–81). Meyer argues that the language of the *Life* possibly dates to the twelfth century and that the text may have been commissioned in response to the discovery of the relics of Colmán in 1122, as recorded by *AU*. See Meyer, *Betha Colmáin*, p. vii.

[95] *Félire*, 28 October (p. 219).

[96] *Félire*, Prologue, 189 (p. 25). See Doherty, 'Use of Relics', p. 99, regarding the significance of the inclusion of the term *Bordgala* (Bordeaux?) in this passage.

[97] *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. by Meyer, p. 97.

[98] See Vendryes, 'Rome au Sens de Cimetière'; Vendryes, 'Ruam'.

this included relics of the saint. It is, therefore, unsurprising in the Irish texts that *scrín* usually denotes a portable shrine rather a more static monument. For example, the *Annals of Ulster* record that the *scrín* of Do Chonna was broken by the heathens in 798: 'Combustio Inse Patraicc o genntibh, 7 borime na crich do breith, 7 scrin Dochonna do briseadh doaibh, 7 innreda mara doaib cene eit*er* Erinn 7 Albain' (The burning of Inis Pátraic by the heathens, and they took the cattle-tribute of the territories, and broke the shrine of Do Chonna, and also made great incursions both in Ireland and in Alba).[99] Similarly, during an attack on Bangor, the relics of Comgall were thrown from their *scrín*, perhaps partly because the shrine was made of precious metals.[100] As mentioned above, Chapter 2, the annals also record the placing of relics within *scríne* made of gold and silver.[101] The Latin *armarium* ('chest', 'safe') is glossed as *scrín* in the St Gall glosses on Priscian.[102] Use of the term in the *Vita Tripartita* also indicates a metal portable object.[103]

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[99] *AU, s.a.* 798.

[100] *AU, s.a.* 824.

[101] *AU, s.a.* 800, 801.

[102] *Thes. Pal.*, ɪɪ, 86, l. 22.

[103] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 938–46 (p. 53).

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